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Popular Motherist Activism in Argentina: Why Do Mothers Radicalize?

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in International Relations from  
The College of William and Mary

by

Emily B. Jackson

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## Abstract

In 1977, the second year of Argentina's last dictatorship, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo donned white headscarves (*pañuelos*) and began weekly marches around the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires to bring attention to the disappearance of their children. By taking up a public defense of motherhood, they transferred a private role into a public, political act, established themselves as motherist activists, and effectively criticized the dictatorship. Today the women continue to organize, but their agenda has shifted from "apolitical" motherism to a radical anti-neoliberal, anti-imperialist critique. What caused this shift in the Madres' message? Although the literature has addressed how the Madres evolved, charting their changing claims and tactics over time, the question of why they were successful in shifting their claims to such radical political-economic critiques, given their collective identity as mothers, has yet to be adequately addressed. Using archival primary and secondary sources from Argentina in 1973 to the present, I show how the Madres developed an intergenerational form of popular motherist activism: first, I offer to the social movement literature the innovative theory of master frame hybridization, and argue that the Madres invented a popular motherist framing that resonated with their audience; second, they justified and gave meaning to their evolving activism via an intergenerational sense of emotion, and specifically, a feeling of popular motherist anger; and finally, that this shift was catalyzed by the experience and disposition of one leader, Hebe de Bonafini.

## Introduction

On April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1977, fourteen women traveled to the Plaza de Mayo in downtown Buenos Aires, the location of the presidential *Casa Rosada* and nucleus of Argentine politics and history. The women's children had disappeared, and after weeks or months of being turned away by police and the judicial system, they planned to have an audience with President of the dictatorial *juntas* Jorge Videla. The armed forces responded first with denial, then with pejoratives, labeling them "the Mad Mothers," and inevitably with violence.<sup>1</sup> Twelve Madres were disappeared by the dictatorship, but the women refused to stop organizing and by 1983 they had obtained international attention (including a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize), led resistance marches alongside a broad coalition of reform-minded, mostly leftist parties and unions, and contributed in no small way to the downfall of the dictatorship.

By transferring a private role into a public, political act, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo effectively criticized a dictatorship, revolutionized motherhood, and were able to use international influence to bring down the *juntas* and export a model of maternal politics and motherist activism that would help women fighting authoritarianism across Latin America. The Madres were one of the first of many movements by mothers and family members that incorporated the feminine and familial as political and public in the fight against violence, and as such they are a namesake of what has been termed "motherist activism."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Marguerite Guzman Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1994), 79.

<sup>2</sup> See Cynthia L. Bejarano, "Las Super Madres de Latino America: Transforming Motherhood by Challenging Violence in Mexico, Argentina, and El Salvador," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 23, no. 1 (April 1, 2002): 126–50; Elena Shabliy, "The Women's Resistance Movement in Argentina," in *Motherhood and War: International Perspectives* (Springer, 2014), 85–94; Josephine L. Savarese, "Leaving a Light on for Ash: Explorations into the Activist Mothering of Coralee Smith (Mother of Ashley Smith, 1988-2007).," *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research & Community Involvement* 8 (2017); M. Cristina Alcalde, "Empowered Mothering Among Poor Latina Women," *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* 11 (2) (2009), 134-142.

Following the post-dictatorship rise of a neoliberal economic agenda, repeated protest cycles, revived populism, and the long-awaited implementation of transitional justice for Argentina's *desaparecidos* (disappeared), scholarship on anti-neoliberal resistance and popular movements in Argentina has persisted but scholarship on the Madres specifically has waned. Yet the women remain a powerful force in Argentine civil society, yielding measureable moral authority and drawing thousands to the Plaza for their social justice marches. Although the imagery and identity of motherhood remains central to their protest and identity, the Madres are no longer primarily concerned with the return of the children who disappeared 40 years ago. Today, the Madres march for a radical anti-neoliberal and anti-imperialist agenda that stands in stark contrast to their dictatorship-era image of expressly apolitical mothers as such. What caused this radical shift in the Madres' message, and how has their enduring influence impacted or been informed by changing political-economic conditions in Argentina?

This project will analyze the Madres de Plaza de Mayo over a 40-year period using archival sources from Argentine media and civil society in an attempt to gain a greater understanding of why the Madres' radicalized claims resonated with their political environment. I offer several innovations: first, I offer to the social movements literature a theory of master frame hybridization, in which a social movement invents a new identity by adopting and fusing two master frames; second, I apply the concept of emotional habitus to the interaction context of the political process, and show how political and economic events change the affective social atmosphere, which creates opportunities for meaning-making via expressions of emotion; and finally, I contribute to the literature on leadership in social movements by demonstrating how a particular individual can play a decisive role in the survivability, evolution and collective identity of a movement.

This paper will proceed as follows: first, I will provide an overview of the Madres and social movements literature to establish a modified, nuanced political process approach for analyzing long-term movement evolution; second, I theorize for the first time a process of master frame hybridization, and show how the Madres combined resonant frames available in their environment to construct a novel master frame; third, I discuss the maternal emotions that drove the Madres' work and created meaning in their protest (with particular attention to a sense of popular motherist anger); and finally, I argue that the experience and disposition of one leader, Hebe de Bonafini, had a decisive impact on survivability and evolution of the movement.

### Political Process and Social Movement Evolution

Sociologists, historians, and political scientists have studied the Madres for the innovative ways in which they used their identities as mothers to make effective claims against an authoritarian government. Our question centers not on this revolutionary foundation but rather on their survivability and radical evolution; as such, we will need to establish a broader theoretical repertoire for analyzing the Madres and their changing goals and tactics. To do this, we now turn to an overview of the social movement literature.

#### *The Madres as a Social Movement*

What factors drive individuals to organize collectively and establish social movements? A classic answer is resource mobilization theory, which asserts that social movement mobilization and success is "consistently related to the greater presence of available resources."<sup>3</sup> Resources can be moral, cultural, social-organizational, human, or material. Although the Madres had little access to material resources like money or human resources like education,

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<sup>3</sup> Bob Edwards and John D. McCarthy, "Resources and Social Movement Mobilization," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, 2004, 116.

they were rich in moral, cultural and social resources the maternal social role and its emotions, or a rich history of popular contention.<sup>4</sup>

This approach does not help us answer the question at hand; even if the Madres have had abundant resources for 40 years, resource mobilization relies on a materialist epistemology that can explain the birth or survivability of a movement but offers little for understanding how identity and emotion change so drastically over time. To glean an understanding of changing claims in social movements, we must look beyond a purely rationalist explanation to a more contextually and emotionally informed framework. This will allow us to explain not only how the Madres acted, but also why their identity evolved, and why that evolution was so resonant.

This more comprehensive approach may be found in the political process approach, which states that actors do not simply mobilize whenever they have grievances and resources with which to communicate them, but rather when changing political structures signify that “the political system is becoming increasingly vulnerable to change.”<sup>5</sup> Sociologist Hanspeter Kriesi theorized a framework for the political process approach that incorporates three sets of variables: the political opportunity structure, the interaction context, and the configuration of actors. I will introduce to this framework a nuanced understanding of temporality from Douglas McAdam and William Sewell and collective identity as emotional expression in order to analyze the Madres’ evolution. First, I will explain McAdam and Sewell’s four temporalities to show how they can be incorporated into the political process approach. Then, I will explain in more detail the components and processes involved in each of the three aspects of the approach: political opportunity structure, interaction context, and configuration of actors.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 125-128.

<sup>5</sup> Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 49.

## Temporality and Political Process

Since our discussion of the Madres does not seek to explain how the emergence of their movement occurred but rather how they evolved over decades of activism, it is important to establish a framework of analysis that is capable of taking into account events, emotions and resources from not only the present political opportunity structure but rather from a diversity of temporalities. In order to establish this framework of discussing such intertemporal phenomena, I will make use of the four temporalities impacting social movements discussed by McAdam and Sewell.<sup>6</sup> I will show how the temporal distinctions they use can be incorporated into an understanding of the political process framework in order to better understand how events and emotions, as well as traditions and social resources, that color the political process can be understood as long-term, evolving processes.

McAdam and Sewell (2001) first described two frequently referenced temporalities of contention, long-term change processes and protest cycles. Long-term change processes are phenomena “that simultaneously destabilized power relations and afforded new groups organizational/associational bases for mobilization” such as globalization and democratization.<sup>7</sup> These processes drive individuals to action by changing their grievance structures and their access to political power via institutional structures. Protest cycles are periods “of active mobilization and protest by or on behalf of various segments of society” such as Argentina’s labor activism of the 1940s or the human rights movement of the early 1980s.<sup>8</sup>

McAdam and Sewell also introduced two less frequently referenced temporalities that likewise impact contention: transformative events and cultural epochs in contention.

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<sup>6</sup> Doug McAdam and William H. Sewell Jr, “Its About Time: Temporality in the Study of Contentious Politics,” in *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*, 2001, 89–126.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 91.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 96.



Transformative events are “transformations and rearticulations of the cultural and social structures that were already in operation before the event,” thus embodying “turning points in structural change.”<sup>9</sup> These events can be political, economic, or personal in nature, and often create an emotional response. For example, a “suddenly imposed grievance,” such as the disappearance of one’s child, is a transformative event in which discontent is not a constant but rather a suddenly incurred emotion that drives agents to action when they would not have acted before.<sup>10</sup>

Cultural epochs in contention are long stretches of time in which “certain forms of contentious politics, once invented, tend to remain available” as “‘master templates’ of contention.”<sup>11</sup> These master frames are “collective action frames that have expanded in scope and influence such that they color and constrain the orientations and activities of other movements within cycles of protest.”<sup>12</sup> Frames offer claims, tactics and repertoires that represent organizational, emotional and social resources to social movements.

The two longer-term of these, long-term change processes and cultural epochs in contention, are structural in nature in that they both represent long periods of time over which social and political structures become vulnerable to change, altering individuals’ sense of collective efficacy. As such, these long-term processes play a greater role in determining the political opportunity structure. The other two are shorter term in nature, as though they are influenced by collective efficacy, they also reflect the more immediate effects of perceived

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>10</sup> Hanspeter Kriesi, “Political Context and Opportunity,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, 2004, 80; Dieter Rucht, “Komplexe Phänomene—komplexe Erklärungen,” in *Paradigmen Der Bewegungsforschung* (Springer, 1998), 109.

<sup>11</sup> Kriesi, “Political Context,” 91, 112.

<sup>12</sup> David A. Snow, “Framing Processes, Ideology, and Discursive Fields,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, 2004, 380–412.

injustices and the emotions they produce. This suggests that these shorter-term processes may play a role in determining the interaction context—the immediate context linking structures and actors to action—of the political process. I will now explain in further detail the three components of the political process approach.

#### Political opportunity structure

The political opportunity structure describes the circumstances of a political landscape that can inform or enable social movements, including political institutions. These can be open, allowing easy access to participation, or closed, as in an authoritarian system where participation is limited and difficult to access. Further, they may be centralized, allowing limited pathways to action, or decentralized, allowing for a broader scope of potential participation and “a somewhat greater capacity to act” in a militant, extralegal capacity.<sup>13</sup>

Beyond these institutional and structural components are the rich array of emotional, symbolic and tactical resources available from historical, political and social context. Sociologist Ruud Koopmans observed that moments of collective action are not independent but rather connected historically and spatially “with other instances of collective action,” and are informed by their location in these continuing waves of contention.<sup>14</sup> Therefore when analyzing the emergence and evolution of social movements, resources from the past or present, and emotions arising immediately or simmering over a long time, can all play a role.

An example of one such time-tested resource is the master frames that develop over epochs of contention and inform activism over a long period of time. The Madres played a key role in the creation and definition of a much-discussed master frame in Latin American history:

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<sup>13</sup> Kriesi, “Political Context,” 70.

<sup>14</sup> Ruud Koopmans, “Protest in Time and Space: The Evolution of Waves of Contention,” *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, 2004, 19.

that of motherist activism. While I agree that this frame was a central part of the Madres' collective identity and action throughout their activism, I will argue that this was not the only master frame operating within their political opportunity structure. Rather, the Madres' activism was informed by the intersecting master frames of motherist activism and anti-globalism.

### Interaction context

The interaction context links “structures and configuration to agency and action.” If the previous aspect of the political process framework represents long-term, large-scale political structures, we may think of this aspect as the short-term set of events and experiences that “spark” social movements to action. It is informed by the political structure as well as the “opportunity set” of experiences and happenings that face a social movement.<sup>15</sup> The opportunity set is a “set of necessary conditions for the emergence of contention,” including “precipitating factors,” “contingent” or “catalyzing” events. The way people respond to these events—processing information and making decisions regarding acts of contention—is not solely a rationalistic or materialistic response, but rather is informed by an individual and collective emotional response to the event in question.

Exactly how the feeler assigns causal and/or remedial blame depends on how the issue is framed. Framing processes are necessarily dynamic since they describe the continuing practices of actors who “frame, assign meaning to and interpret relevant events and conditions.”<sup>16</sup> Frames can inform collective identity, the object of protest, methods in collective action, and the historical and relational location of specific movements in the broader protest repertoire.

### Configuration of actors

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<sup>15</sup> Kriesi, “Political Context,” 77, 80.

<sup>16</sup> David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, “Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization,” *International Social Movement Research* 1, no. 1 (1988): 198.

Finally, the configuration of actors describes the relationship between protagonists, antagonists, and bystanders in the political structure.<sup>17</sup> The posturing between these three factions is both determined by and informant of each group's collective identity. Scott Hunt and Robert Benford observe: "Rooted in and shaped by particular sociocultural contexts, collective identities are produced and reproduced in ongoing interactions between allies, oppositional forces, and audiences... While providing a sense of we-ness and collective agency, collective identities also create a sense of other."<sup>18</sup>

Collective identity is most commonly based on "ascribed traits" such as class and gender, or can be formulated through "beliefs or principles, such as religions" or political affiliation.<sup>19</sup> As Melucci argues, an individual's "differential capacity to define an identity" then informs "the propensity of an individual to become involved in collective action."<sup>20</sup> Importantly, collective identity informs a movement's ability to build commitment and solidarity, can engender counter-responses from movement adversaries, and even alter individuals' personal identities.<sup>21</sup> Thus, as we analyze how the Madres' collective identity has changed over time, we must look not only at how they have responded to changes in the political environment but how the political environment, the configuration of actors, and the actions and perceptions of individual Madres have changed with their identity over time.

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<sup>17</sup> Scott A. Hunt, Robert D. Benford, and David A. Snow, "Identity Fields: Framing Processes and the Social Construction of Movement Identities," *New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity* 185 (1994), 185.

<sup>18</sup> Scott A. Hunt and Robert D. Benford, "Collective Identity, Solidarity, and Commitment," *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, 2004, 450.

<sup>19</sup> Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, eds., *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 8; see also Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper, "Collective Identity and Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 27, no. 1 (2001): 283–305.

<sup>20</sup> Alberto Melucci, "Getting Involved: Identity and Mobilization in Social Movements," *International Social Movement Research* 1, no. 26 (1988): 343.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 449.

In a case as emotion- and identity-driven as the Madres', the latter point deserves special attention: how have individual Madres influenced the group's changing collective identity? Morris and Staggenborg describe leaders in social movements as "strategic decision-makers who inspire and organize others" and "offer frames, tactics, and organizational vehicles that allow participants to construct a collective identity and participate in collective action."<sup>22</sup> They also note that suddenly imposed grievances can motivate new leaders to take action within a movement; we see this reflected in the founding Madres' decision to organize after the disappearance of their children alongside Argentina's human rights movement.<sup>23</sup>

Could the same be said for individual leaders' reiterative claim-making in the process of sustaining a movement? In the context of this study, it is important for us to consider not only how events and grievances lead to the foundation of a movement, but also how they motivate leaders to take action in organizing others. Just as collective action is determined by the experiences and disposition of collective identity, the processes of leadership are dependent on the experience and disposition of the individual at hand. Further, because leaders enable, organize and *lead* the processes of collective identity and action, it follows that individual leaders' experiences and dispositions impact not only their own personal style of leadership but also the entire collective identity and action repertoire of the movement.

I will argue that individual leaders' experiences and dispositions can have a decisive impact on the evolution of a movement by analyzing the case of the Asociación Madres President Hebe de Bonafini. Hebe's leadership style is an amalgamation of her upbringing in the working-class Peronist neighborhoods of industrial La Plata, dedication to revolutionary

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<sup>22</sup> Aldon D. Morris and Suzanne Staggenborg, "Leadership in Social Movements," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, 2004, 180.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

motherhood, a penchant for controversy and an unapologetically confrontational personality. Her profound influence not only caused a schism between the radical and more moderate Madres factions, but also changed the public perception and collective identity by placing the organization in the forefront of contentious politics.

#### Literature Review: The Madres' modern resistance

A number of studies have commented on the various ways in which the Madres have been able to remain relevant throughout their lifespan: by “contesting the dominant regime of historicity” to keep the past alive in the present; by sustaining embedded affective ties across geographical boundaries; by carrying on a liberation theology heritage; by appropriating the symbolic place of the Plaza de Mayo and constructing an identity around it; and by integrating themselves with the Kirchner Presidencies.<sup>24</sup>

A few studies have directly addressed the Madres' radicalization. D'Alessandro, writing on the Madres' tactics directly following Argentina's democratization, argues that the Madres' impossible demand of “appearance with life” constituted an “ethical intransigence” that rejected a democracy incapable of making drastic changes in the structure of state institutions, thus transforming “the cause of human rights into vanguard.”<sup>25</sup> While this explanation may justify the

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<sup>24</sup> Berber Bevernage and Koen Aerts, “Haunting Pasts: Time and Historicity as Constructed by the Argentine Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Radical Flemish Nationalists,” *Social History* 34, no. 4 (November 1, 2009): 393, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071020903256986>; Fernando J. Bosco, “The Madres de Plaza de Mayo and Three Decades of Human Rights' Activism: Embeddedness, Emotions, and Social Movements,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96, no. 2 (2006): 348–361; Heike Walz, “The Madres Appear on the Public Plaza de Mayo in Argentina: Towards Human Rights as a Key for a Public Ecology That Carries on the Liberation Heritage,” *International Journal of Public Theology* 3, no. 2 (2009): 165–186; Vera Sofia Rodríguez, “Movimientos Sociales, Territorio e Identidad: El movimiento de Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo,” *Geograficando: Revista de Estudios Geográficos* 8, no. 8 (2012): 1–20; Enriue Andriotti Romanin, “De la resistencia a la integración. Las transformaciones de la Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo en la ‘era Kirchner,’” *Estudios Políticos* 41 (2012): 36–56.

<sup>25</sup> Martín D'Alessandro, “Los Movimientos Sociales en la Transición Democrática. El Caso de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo: Sentimiento y Discurso,” *América Latina, Hoy* 20 (1998): 43–44.

Madres' antagonism toward Alfonsín and Menem, it does not explain their anti-neoliberalism. Borland, writing on the Madres in the neoliberal era, argues that the Madres "have amplified [their objectives] to renew their foci and synthesize the worries they share with others in Argentina and abroad" in order to "deal with Latin American unity, neoliberalism and the recent economic crisis in Argentina."<sup>26</sup> In another article, she argues that they "used collective action frames related to their identity as aging mothers to draw connections between past and present, and to explain and support the expansion of their goals" to critique neoliberalism.<sup>27</sup> The Madres themselves maintain that they adopted the activism of their children; in her book, Bouvard quotes a mother who simply claimed "our children begot us."<sup>28</sup> But not all of their children were in fact activists, nor necessarily leftists. And this innocence was integral to their initial resistance.

Though insightful, none of these studies address the question of exactly *why* the Madres dedicated themselves to a leftist political-economic fight outside the boundaries of maternity and family. Even when scholars address the question of their changing collective action, they ask *how* the Madres have remained relevant, *how* they have expanded their message, *how* their activities have informed and been informed by recent history. They do not address the *why*: the inconsistency between the Madres' founding collective action frame of maternal resistance, informed by a collective identity of previously non-militant, not necessarily leftist mothers whose claims originate in the private (and whose success is largely thanks to this connection to the private); and their current collective action frame, informed by a collective identity of *militant* mothers whose claims are mostly *public* and *radical* in nature, no longer quiet and symbolic, and based on a leftist political-economic agenda.

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<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Borland, "Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo en la Era Neoliberal: Ampliando objetivos para unir el pasado, el presente y el futuro," *Colombia Internacional* 63 (2006): 141.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>28</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 178.

What changes in the actors and factors of the Madres' movement, and the environment in which they operated, created this new collective action frame? Is it consistent with their initial collective identity and action frame? If not, how have the Madres maintained legitimacy through their radical changes, and why have they remained intelligible within the field of Argentine politics despite their changes?

## Data & Methods

### *Methodology*

My methodology will not seek to reiterate a history of the Madres but rather to identify causal mechanisms behind critical shifts in the movement. I will do this by engaging in process tracing within the Madres' movement, starting from their activities during the dictatorship and tracing the ways in which their messaging and tactics have evolved over time.

As I am analyzing a movement over 40 years, I will organize the process in terms of the political process framework introduced by Kriesi and the temporalities established by McAdam and Sewell. First, I will analyze the political opportunity structure, with attention to long-term change processes and especially cultural epochs in contention, by considering master frames used by the Madres. I will in particular focus on the motherist activism frame and the anti-globalist frame. Next, I will analyze the interaction context, with attention to protest cycles, transformative events and the emotions they inspire. I will particularly highlight political and economic crises and the ways the Madres interpreted and assigned forms of blame for these events. Finally, I will analyze the configuration of actors, and will argue that the influence of one leader Hebe de Bonafini had a decisive impact on the Madres' posturing as an organization and their role in civil society.

### *Data collection*



To carry out this analysis, I will use a variety of primary sources published by the Madres, their contemporaries, and media outlets in Argentina. I spent seven weeks in Buenos Aires and La Plata, Argentina, in June and July of 2017 collecting copies of archival documents from *hemerotecas* (newspaper archives) as well as the Comisión Provincial por la Memoria, which houses the Buenos Aires Provincial Police Force (DIPPBA) Archives of 1956 to 1998.

From the Comisión I selected 159 pages of materials describing activities of the Madres from the 1970s through the 1990s. These documents include police reports of Madres' activities, as well as fliers and other documents originating from the Madres and their allies. In order to trace the Madres' radical framing, I sought documents related to the Madres' development of economic critique, such as their connections to leftist allies, their early mentions of economic themes, and interviews or police reports that evidence individuals' shifting perceptions. I am indebted to the direction and support of Magdalena Lanteri at the Management and Preservation of Archives Program of the DIPPBA Archives, as well as the entire staff of the Comisión for their guidance and encouragement during my time in Argentina.

At the *hemerotecas*, my task was more intimidating, as these archives hold a wide variety of newspapers with distinct theoretical leanings, and the scope of my research is 40 years. To target my search, I compiled a list of significant days and months in contemporary Argentine history throughout the Madres' lifespan, including the following: the month surrounding the Madres' first march; their resistance marches, which started during the dictatorship and were carried out for 20 consecutive years; significant developments in neoliberal economic policies, such as the implementation of Brady Plan reforms; external economic pressures, such as the Tequila Crisis; progress in legal and social forms of justice, such as Due Obedience and Final Stop laws; and outbursts of protest cycles, such as the HIJOS' *escraches* or the *piqueteros* of the

1990s and early 2000s. In compiling this list, I created a succinct timeline of politics, economics, memory and contention where I could focus my research efforts.

I selected multiple sources from each moment in history so as to avoid favoring any one ideological bias over another. I included the following: thorough, reliable, slightly right-of-center dailies *La Nación* and *La Prensa*; historically Peronist and occasionally inflammatory but nevertheless widely circulated daily *Clarín*; leftist, human rights-minded and also occasionally radical daily *Página 12* (founded only in 1987); and Buenos Aires's only English daily, the *Buenos Aires Herald* (*BA Herald*) which provides reliable information and during Argentina's dictatorship earned the distinction of remaining less under the thumb of censorship laws than its peers. Although not all of the editions throughout my timeline were available for all of these sources, I was careful to obtain a healthy mix for each moment in question. This is important to my research question since I aim to describe why the Madres were able to expand and shift the domain of their claims to encompass a broader spectrum of political and economic issues, and in doing so implicate a broader coalition of allies and adversaries. By analyzing the discourse describing not only the Madres' activities but the entire political and economic context around them, I will be more able to situate the Madres in the broader context of Argentine society, and identify national-level events and frames that have influenced the Madres.

I gathered my sources from the *hemeroteca* of the National University of La Plata in Buenos Aires province, as well as the *hemeroteca* of the National Library of Argentina in Buenos Aires. I photographed articles with mentions of the following: the Madres and associated significant human rights/social justice organizations; neoliberal economic policies and reforms; legal and social matters related to impunity for the dictatorship; economic crises and associated contentious political responses; and trauma and memory. At the end of my time in Argentina, I

had collected samples of over 933 articles, interviews, photos, and political cartoons, which I later organized by time and subject matter to assist in the analysis process. Again, I am indebted to the knowledge and generosity of the support staff at these *hemerotecas*, as well as Lucas Miguel of the University of La Plata School of Journalism for his instruction and mentorship in a seminar on the history of Argentina's human rights trials.

To trace the Madres' evolution process, I will conduct historical interpretive content analysis of the sources collected. This will involve reading sources and comparatively analyzing how the Madres and their allies frame and communicate the events and emotions driving contention in Argentina, and the actions and discourse of the Madres as they grew more radical. I emphasize the process through which the Madres' actions became intelligible and resonant in Argentine society to understand how the context of Argentine political, economic and social institutions made their radical shift intelligible, justified and poignant to the human rights community and Argentine public.

## Chapter One: The Context of the Madres in Argentina

I will present my results as follows: first, I will provide a historical overview of Argentine politics and economics since the dictatorship, with special attention to the Madres; second, I will analyze the political opportunity structure to show how the Madres engaged in frame hybridization to construct a popular motherist frame for activism; third, I will analyze the Madres' interaction context to show how an intergenerational experience of emotion and particularly popular motherist anger energized the Madres' activism; and finally, I will show how the experience and disposition of an individual leader—in this case, the Madres' Hebe de Bonafini—can play a decisive role in the configuration of actors and evolution of a movement.

### History of the Madres' Political Lifespan

To understand the evolving actors and characteristics of the Madres' movement, we must understand the civil society environment in which they operated. Argentina has avoided dictatorship since 1983, but regardless has experienced political and economic tumult. Social movements across this time blamed a variety of actors, including politicians and International Financial Institutions (IFIs), and contended a variety of issues, including impunity, corruption, and neoliberal economic policies. Collectivities forged new alliances and developed new protest repertoires to respond to various legal, political and economic crises, changing the configuration of actors and interaction context for all Argentine social actors. In fact, the mobilization of working class collectivities operating outside of hierarchical unions or parties “has become an icon of grassroots struggle in the Global South.”<sup>29</sup> These revolutionary movements undoubtedly impacted the political feeling of Argentine society and the increasingly revolutionary Madres.

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<sup>29</sup> Roberta Villalón, “Neoliberalism, Corruption, and Legacies of Contention,” in *IN Latin American Social Movements in the Twenty-First Century*. Richard Stahler-Sholk, Harry E. Vanden, and Glen David Kuecker (Eds.) Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008, 269.

Immediately after the dictatorship, President Raúl Alfonsín of the centrist Radical Civic Union (UCR) party garnered support as a “human rights candidate” and put the military *juntas* on trial in 1985, but soon after passed a number of impunity measures that infuriated human rights organizations (HROs).<sup>30</sup> The laws had been inspired by military discontent with civilian courts’ attempts to bring lower-ranking military officer to trial for human rights violations. Repeated flare-ups culminated in the *carapintadas* crisis of 1987 to 1990, during which military officers staged repeated rebellions that stirred fears of a military coup.<sup>31</sup> The Madres quickly abandoned the president for what they perceived as an affront to their emotional, moral maternal claim. Hebe de Bonafini of the Asociación Madres especially engaged in outspoken critiques and direct action to oppose and ultimately obstruct institutional means of reparations she viewed as paltry forms of consolation compared to their original demand for the return of their children.

Alfonsín had also inherited an abysmal economic situation due to the *juntas*’ irresponsible borrowing and spending practices; he attempted to resolve unemployment and skyrocketing national debt by privatizing state businesses and enacting austerity measures, but the measures failed and his presidency ended with hyperinflation, failed austerity measures and a currency crisis. By the end of his presidency, the Madres and their leftist allies stood firmly opposed to him and the UCR.

His successor Carlos Menem was member of the Peronist Partido Justicialista (PJ), ran as a populist and was elected in 1989, but quickly betrayed his party’s nationalist principles by

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<sup>30</sup> Michael Langan, “Argentine President Menem’s First Pardons: A Comparative Analysis of Coverage by Buenos Aires’ Leading Dailies,” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 16, no. 31 (1991): 145.

<sup>31</sup> Deborah L. Norden, “The Rise of the Lieutenant Colonels: Rebellion in Argentina and Venezuela,” *Latin American Perspectives* 23, no. 3 (1996): 74–86.

enacting Washington Consensus measures to stabilize the economy. He opened the country to free trade, privatized businesses, reduced expenditures, and enacted a one-to-one fixed exchange rate to the U.S. dollar that would prove impossible to finance.<sup>32</sup> The betrayal felt by leftist and working-class Peronists created a crisis of political identity. The Madres were quick to oppose Menem on this front in addition to the human rights front; the Asociación's Hebe fired incendiary criticisms, even insults, admonishing Menem's closeness to Washington within the first months of his presidency.

Argentina's debt increased further, unemployment and capital flight persisted, all while currency crises crippled other IMF borrowers around the world. Additionally, within the first two years of his presidency, Menem again infuriated HROs by passing a series of pardon laws that pardoned over a thousand individuals implicated in crimes against humanity during Argentina's dictatorship.<sup>33</sup> This move was Menem's response to the ongoing *carapintadas* crisis, and an attempt to soothe military-civilian relations and signal stability to the IMF and international financiers. The Madres were incensed by Menem's blanket pardons and pandering to the military, yet another affront to their maternal domain. Hebe's inflammatory insults with Menem created a feud between the two and Menem's disdainful view of the Madres.

The mounting economic crisis and Menem's insistence on increasingly neoliberal economic policies inspired a new protest cycle driven by the working class throughout Argentina in the 1990s and early 2000s. The *piquetero* movement started in 1995 was made up of a broad swath of informal workers, the unemployed, and underemployed who organized without any bureaucratic structure to close down major roadways in both the provinces and city centers of

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<sup>32</sup> Atilio Boron and Mabel Thwaites, "La Expropiación Neoliberal: El Experimento Privatista En La Argentina," *Las Privatizaciones y La Desnacionalización de América Latina*, Buenos Aires, Prometeo (2004), 113-118.

<sup>33</sup> Langan, "Argentine President Menem's First Pardons," 146-148.

Argentina.<sup>34</sup> The movement was “a struggle against unemployment, which under Menem and [his Minister of the Economy] reached catastrophic dimensions, in the face of the abandonment of the unemployed and their demands on the part of the labor unions’ official bureaucracy.”<sup>35</sup> Like the Madres’ inspiration to motherist activists elsewhere, Olviedo argues, “the *piquetero* movement has transformed into a reference for all movements of the exploited.”<sup>36</sup>

Because the movement was characterized by local collectivities utilizing the *piquetero* frame, the movement “fragmented... into hundreds of competing groups” rather than establishing a national level organization.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, this movement is significant for its degree of localization. Its spontaneity, rising from a local sense of collective efficacy and a claim to the domain of community, is reminiscent of the innovative familial grounds of the Madres’ own organization. These truly popular movements show the burgeoning sense of popular anger and sense of collective efficacy in Argentine society during the process of democratization.

Also employed during Menem’s presidency were *escraches*, first popularized by the organization Children for Identity and Justice against Oblivion and Silence (HIJOS, meaning “children,” founded in 1995 by the grown children of individuals disappeared by the dictatorship) in which protesters marched to the homes or offices of unpunished repressors of the dictatorship to publicize the individuals’ crimes, call attention to impunity, and demand justice. As economic anxiety heightened, protesters denouncing abuses of power and lack of responsiveness by politicians, judges, policemen, businessmen, and IFI representatives adopted this collective action frame as well.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Villalón, “Neoliberalism,” 259-260.

<sup>35</sup> Luis Oviedo, “Una historia del movimiento piquetero,” *Razón y Revolución* 9 (2002): 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>37</sup> James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer, “From Popular Rebellion to ‘Normal Capitalism’ in Argentina,” in *Social Movements and State Power: Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador*, 2005, 49.

<sup>38</sup> Villalón, “Neoliberalism,” 264.

The formation of HIJOS represents a significant moment for the Madres as it confirmed and emboldened the intergenerational framing and activist emotion that the Madres had constructed. Since their foundation, the HIJOS have partnered with the Madres in taking a radical approach to human rights activism in the name of their parents.

### Crisis and Contention

President Fernando de la Rúa, another UCR candidate, replaced Menem in 1999 and attempted a variety of panicked measures to curtail Argentina's debt crisis, but ultimately failed. He tried to stop persistent bank runs by introducing a *corralito*, which froze bank deposits, but faced the IMF's refusal to continue monthly payments; in December of 2001, riots broke out across the country that would continue for days and result in dozens of deaths and thousands of injuries.<sup>39</sup> Argentina defaulted on its debt a week later.

The December 2001 riots saw the outbreak of another innovative collective action frame: the *cacerolazo*. In these protests, groups of people self-organized through the internet and mass media to coordinate demonstrations in which people would bang pots and pans out their windows, in the streets, and in plazas "as an expression of their discontent with and repudiation of political and economic conditions."<sup>40</sup> These *cacereros* were "mostly middle-class and included a heterogeneous array of people, from impoverished unemployed small business managers to working professionals;" their collective identity, if existent, was simply discontent.<sup>41</sup> This moment again shows evidence of the powerful sense of popular anger and collective efficacy that the Madres felt in Argentine society.

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<sup>39</sup> Victoria Goddard, "'This Is History': Nation and Experience in Times of Crisis—Argentina 2001," *History and Anthropology* 17, no. 3 (2006): 269–275.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.



Finally, the disproportionate effects of neoliberal economic policies on low-income communities in the 1990s led those communities to adopt new means of grassroots organizing, such as barter clubs and neighborhood assemblies. Barter clubs commenced in the 1990s as places where mostly working-class, low-income, unemployed people could barter goods and services. Though this was a popular practice, it shows the spread of an ethic of care as a means of counteracting justice, something the Madres' own ethic of care and maternal form of activism had created and sustained in Argentine society.

After December 2001, "the government identified [the barter clubs] as another means of contention" as they grew popular with the middle class as well and became marketplaces of solidarity for all those dissatisfied with their place in the broader market economy.<sup>42</sup> Non-partisan neighborhood assemblies, which sometimes interacted with *piquetero* groups but were not affiliated with other institutions, proliferated in this time as well as people sought means of economic and political action outside the delegitimized government.<sup>43</sup>

### *Kirchnerismo and beyond*

After a series of interim presidents, Néstor Kirchner of the PJ was elected in 2003. He sought to revitalize Argentina's economy by supporting industry and public services, negotiated a debt restructuring at one-third Argentina's original debt, avoided structural adjustment programs and promoted his policies with Perón-inspired rhetoric sympathetic to the poor. His return to the policies and rhetoric of the glory days of working-class Peronism won him the support of the Madres and their leftist allies.

In 2007, Kirchner stepped aside and his wife Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, also of the PJ, was elected president. In a controversial move, she nationalized private pension funds to

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 261-263.

finance debt payments, and pursued a variety of expensive, populist fiscal projects aimed to decrease poverty in Argentina.<sup>44</sup> It is unclear how effective her projects were, as her government misreported inflation and poverty statistics.<sup>45</sup> What is clear is that her closeness to the working-class Peronist legacy and commitment to a human rights agenda established a close relationship between her and the Madres, particularly Hebe, which continues in their joint opposition to the current president.

Kirchner's governing philosophy, which was reproduced by Fernández, pursued a "Peronist strategy of development" of "national autonomy and market coordination to increase consumption, social justice and human rights."<sup>46</sup> This emphasis on human rights included overturning Alfonsín- and Menem-era impunity laws, reigniting trials for crimes against humanity, and recuperating ex-detention centers as memory sites to honor the disappeared. The actions earned the Kirchners an alliance with the human rights community and the Madres; many consider the Madres' endorsement of Kirchner as "providing legitimacy and reinforcing Kirchner's rule."<sup>47</sup> Some scholars question the validity of this relationship, suggesting that the "cooptation" of the Madres is "a strategy of Kirchnerism that appropriates the flag of human rights with the objective of legitimizing [other] policies."<sup>48</sup>

This relationship represented a fundamental change in the Madres' organizing tactics, as they redefined their relationship to the state that they historically opposed. The establishment of an alliance with executive power "drove the Madres to redefine their interpretive keys, especially

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<sup>44</sup> Mitchell A. Orenstein, "Pension Privatization in Crisis: Death or Rebirth of a Global Policy Trend?," *International Social Security Review* 64, no. 3 (2011): 73.

<sup>45</sup> Niall Reddy, "Argentina: The End of Kirchnerism?," *New Politics* 15, no. 1 (2014): 87-94.

<sup>46</sup> Ernesto Vivares, Leonardo Díaz Echenique, and Javier Ozorio, "Argentina: Reforming Neoliberal Capitalism," in *Reclaiming Latin America: Experiments in Radical Social Democracy*, 2009, 200.

<sup>47</sup> Petras and Veltmeyer, "From popular rebellion to 'normal capitalism,'" 48.

<sup>48</sup> Enrique Andriotti Romanin, "¿Cooptación, Oportunidades Políticas y Sentimientos? Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo y El Gobierno de Néstor Kirchner," *Polis. Revista Latinoamericana*, no. 39 (2014), 231.

in terms of their antagonists and their link to executive power.”<sup>49</sup> As Enrique Romanin argues, this link between the Madres and Kirchner signified a “restoration of the activist past;” “for the Madres, Kirchner had vindicated their children and, in a way, was perceived as one of them.”<sup>50</sup>

As a result, the Madres put their militant activities aside during the Kirchner presidencies. In January of 2006, the Madres announced that they would cease their annual *Marchas de Resistencia*. In a final march, Hebe claimed “the enemy is no longer in the House of Government, the enemy inhabits the multinationals”<sup>51</sup> Further, they pursued institutionalization: the Asociación Madres’ organization swelled as their formerly popular-run radio station, television channel and university all became state projects; the regularly participated in state memory projects; they even organized a state-sponsored housing project to build schools and employ and house poor individuals in a Buenos Aires slum.

Not all Argentines were so infatuated with the Kirchners; starting in 2012, “*cacerolazos*, general strikes and mobilizations organized by the major labor unions” turned out to protest currency controls, general corruption, and Fernández’s relations with the media.<sup>52</sup> In 2015, following Fernández’s failed attempts to circumvent Argentine law preventing three presidential terms, the selected PJ candidate Daniel Scioli lost to center-right Mauricio Macri. Because of the relative newness of Macri’s presidency (less than two years), there is no literature on the Madres’ relationship with Macri thus far; but it is clear from their rhetoric and activism that they are staunchly opposed to him. A recent favorite chant at the Madres’ and their allies’ marches is “*Macri, basura, vos sos la dictadura*,” or “Macri, trash, you are the dictatorship.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Romanin, “De la resistencia a la integración, 49.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>51</sup> Alejandra Dandan, “Acto final para una marcha de 25 años,” *Página 12*, 27 January 2006.

<sup>52</sup> Leandro Anibal Gamallo, “Entre Paros y Cacerolazos: Apuntes Sobre La Conflictividad Social En La Argentina Reciente,” 2013.

<sup>53</sup> Facundo Falduto, “Macri no es la dictadura, pero debe responder por un desaparecido,” *Perfil*, 29 August 2017.

This short history shows how central the Madres' voices and identities have been to the evolving democratization process in Argentina. Their perspective as permanently and profoundly linked to the past dictatorship endowed them with a great deal of moral authority that allowed them to remain relevant and contest democratic presidents in the 1980s and 1990s; their continued militancy drew the attention of leftist Presidents Kirchner, and though they briefly pursued institutionalization, they remain militant, headline-grabbing mothers today. I will now expand on the brief historical context provided here to illustrate in greater detail the social and political processes developing around the Madres as well as their evolving responses.

## **Chapter Two: Frame Hybridization**

This section will focus on the political opportunity structure in which the Madres evolved and radicalized, with special focus on the long-term change processes and cultural epochs of contention in Argentina. The cultural epochs of contention experienced in Argentina before and during the Madres' activism inspired the master frame of anti-globalism, while long-term change processes that challenged traditional motherhood, largely fueled by their own collective identity, allowed the Madres to speak out and continuously rearticulate the motherist activist frame according to their claims.

I argue that these two historical master frames came together in the Madres' practice of hybridized activism, which framed issues in terms of both motherist and popular concerns. In what follows, I develop the concept of master frame hybridization: when movement actors elect to uptake actions from two different master frames, and develop the ability to frame movement claims in a hybridized way, the claim takes on significance and resonates with a broader audience. This is an important innovation as it shows the potential for agency and self-definition, as well as the potential for expansion of movement claims to historical issues for a particular society, based on available collective action frames.

Because the repression of the dictatorship resulted in an alliance between the Madres and other persecuted radical leftist groups, the Madres from early on imbued their sense of motherhood with radicalism. Over time the use of the master frames of anti-globalism and motherism evolved such that the Madres themselves invented and practiced a hybridized popular motherist activist framing in which they themselves were the mothers of all the working poor of Argentina. In what follows, I develop this concept of frame hybridization: first, I will define the master frames at play in the Madres' activism; second, I will analyze how the frames interact

with each other by showing their role in Argentine civil society and especially the Madres' discourse over time; finally, I will describe the Madres' popular anti-globalist motherist framing for activism, and show its expression over the past 40 years.

### Motherism

Before the Madres, the motherly ideal in Argentina was caring but not political.<sup>54</sup> Expectations for women in Argentina reflected *marianismo*, characterized by “submissiveness, purity, devotion to children, and moral strength,” in contrast to *machismo*, which emphasizes “the supremacy of men over women.”<sup>55</sup> Argentina's dictators saw themselves in a position of ultimate authority, and focused on the promotion of a traditional role for women in defense of “tradition, family, and property.”<sup>56</sup> This allowed the *juntas* to control all aspects of public life and to bridge their authority to the private sphere as well, while women and mothers especially were expected to stay politely and passively in the private of their home.

By transferring emotional, private claims to the very center of Argentine politics in the Plaza de Mayo, in front of the military *juntas* who insisted on the importance of traditional motherhood, the Madres challenged the public/private gender divide. They “insisted that their anguish was not simply personal and private, but a matter of *public* business” (emphasis in the original).<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, they did not rebel against their role as mothers; the Asociación Madres president Hebe de Bonafini remarked once that she was “still a housewife... happy and fulfilled in her political work.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Bejarano, “Las Super Madres,” 408.

<sup>55</sup> Elena Shabliy, “The Women's Resistance Movement in Argentina,” in *Motherhood and War: International Perspectives*, ed. Dana Cooper and Claire Phelan (New York: Palgrave and MacMillan, 2014), 85-86.

<sup>56</sup> Rita Arditti, *Searching for Life: The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Disappeared Children of Argentina* (Univ of California Press, 1999), 8.

<sup>57</sup> Martha A. Ackelsberg, *Resisting Citizenship: Feminist Essays on Politics, Community, and Democracy* (Routledge, 2013), 95.

<sup>58</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 191.

By maintaining their identity as mothers and bringing their private roles and claims to the public stage, the Madres “revolutionized the very concept of maternity as passive and in the service of the state into a public and socialized claim against the state.”<sup>59</sup> When the *juntas* kidnapped their family members, the Madres’ roles as mothers lost meaning, and their socialization as mothers compelled them to organize and to incorporate maternal thinking as a principle in their militancy.<sup>60</sup>

The Madres’ was a form of “women’s politics of resistance,” in that it was informed by their gender roles, and further created a maternal politics of resistance that would be replicated by motherist activist groups throughout Latin America.<sup>61</sup> Scholar Rita Noonan, in a historical analysis of Chilean society, argued that conceptions of maternity common throughout Latin America contributed to a “‘maternal’ collective action frame” in their resistance to the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet.<sup>62</sup> Scholar Cynthia Bejarano described how common Latin American cultural themes of *marianismo* and the *mater dolorosa* (Mother of Sorrows) contributed to “the transformation of gendered citizenship into forms of resistance by Latina mothers of ‘disappeared’ young women” in Argentina, El Salvador, and years later in Mexico as well, suggesting the temporal versatility of the motherist frame.<sup>63</sup>

Though important, the motherist frame alone offers little insight to the question of the Madres’ radicalization. If it were the case that the Madres’ collective identity was permanently and solely rooted in motherist activism, the Madres would have continued making claims

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>60</sup> Karen Ortiz Cuchivague, “Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo y su legado por la defensa de los derechos humanos,” *Trabajo Social* 14 (2012): 165–77; Marysa Navarro, “The Personal Is Political: Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo,” in *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements*, 1989, 241–258.

<sup>61</sup> Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (Beacon Press, 1995), 127–239.

<sup>62</sup> Rita K. Noonan, “Women against the State: Political Opportunities and Collective Action Frames in Chile’s Transition to Democracy,” in *Sociological Forum*, vol. 10 (Springer, 1995), 91.

<sup>63</sup> Bejarano, “Las Super-Madres,” 126.

regarding the wellbeing and legacy of their children and would have maintained a maternal public image rather than allying with radical leftist groups, adopting revolutionary leftist framing and expressing popular anger. Yet another distinctly Argentine master frame offers an answer to this puzzle.

### Leftist Peronism & Argentine Anti-Globalism

The other master frame at play in the Madres' story is a form of anti-globalism that has been influenced by continent-wide anti-globalization protest, but which nevertheless is distinctly Argentine in that it relies on country-specific histories and repertoires. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the country experienced four major contentious episodes: the radical civil rights movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the labor movement of the mid-1940s, the “proliferation of alternative political groups” such as insurgent and extremist groups in the 1960s and 1970s, and the human rights movement of the early 1980s (when the Madres were founded).<sup>64</sup> This history of contention “played a key role as references” to later claim-makers, who could use frames and tactics developed earlier in advancing their own causes.<sup>65</sup>

Especially important to what would become the anti-globalist frame was the labor movement of the 1940s, marked by the rise of former military general Juan Domingo Perón. Perón rose to power largely because of his ability to win over a substantial voting bloc: the then recently enfranchised poor working class. He established the Justicialist political party, whose *tres banderas* (“three flags,” or three rallying cries) are political sovereignty, economic independence and social justice, and maintained power by maintaining popularity among the labor unions and working class. Though Perón's support base would balkanize into leftist and rightist sub-groups, his initial rallying cries were highly influential in encouraging mobilization

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<sup>64</sup> Villalón, “Neoliberalism,” 256-257.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 256.



and establishing a political program for the working poor. In a 1992 opinion piece in the human rights-minded leftist newspaper *Página 12*, philosopher and former Montonero José Pablo Feinmann declared, “...the people, the marginalized, the condemned of the earth were Peronists. Peronism was the political identity of the working class.”<sup>66</sup> Feinmann abandoned Peronism during Menem’s neoliberal government, but later returned to support the leftist Peronist Kirchners.

Referring to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, political scientists Paul Almeida and Hank Johnston identified the “anti-globalization master frame” which “incorporates the local moral economy of aggrieved population within a larger and sophisticated schema of understandings about the global economy.”<sup>67</sup> The Madres explicitly anti-imperialist message, which often attributes unemployment and poverty to the United States and international finance institutions (IFIs), is a clear example of the use of this frame. But the Madres are not an anti-globalization movement; they have nuanced positions on social, economic, and political issues and organize on the principle of justice generally rather than anti-imperialism specifically. The Madres do embrace anti-globalizationism, but in a specific, Argentine way.

In Argentina, the radical Peronist tradition of popular mobilization and resource nationalism created social movement repertoires for marchers of the future. It suggested claims both specifically national (pro-social programs, pro-trade protection) and internationally generalizable (anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism) that the Argentine left generally continue to make. Also developed by working class militants during the time of Perón and the labor movement were tactics (strikes, militant songs with drums, and grand marches to the Plaza de

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<sup>66</sup> “Pueblo y Verdad,” *Página 12*, 26 December 1992

<sup>67</sup> Hank Johnston and Paul Almeida, *Latin American Social Movements: Globalization, Democratization, and Transnational Networks* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 7.

Mayo) for popular protest still in use by the Madres and their allies today. The memory of Perón and his wife Eva's grand addresses to the popular masses gathered in the Plaza de Mayo in the 1940s imbued the very birthplace of the Madres' movements with a historical connection to working class militancy. In the shadow of Perón, anti-globalism in Argentina is a master frame of anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism practiced as popular protest by the working class in the streets (and especially in the Plaza de Mayo).

### The Intersection of Motherism and Anti-Globalism

From the earliest years of the Madres' activity, they were automatically and irrevocably allied with the poor working class who sought relief from the oppressive military *juntas*. The cause of this inevitable alliance lay not in the Madres' political views, which were varied, but rather in the stigmatization of the Madres and the *juntas'* treatment of them as an illegitimate opposition movement. Though the Madres themselves did not take up the use of the radical leftist anti-globalism frame until after the dictatorship, their own motherist activist frame was developed alongside anti-globalist opposition groups.

#### *1977-1983: The Early Years*

According to the *BA Herald*, on June 22, 1978, about 300 women were taking part in the Madres' weekly march when "several well-dressed men in the crowd began to chant 'Argentina! Argentina!'" blocking the Madres' path, calling them anti-Argentine and their demonstration "well-orchestrated theatre." "One person in the crowd criticized the mothers for having brought up their children wrongly and declared that 'they have disappeared or are six feet under precisely because they were no little angels.'" Then: "After the mothers' demonstration broke up, three of

the middle-aged men who had begun the chants of ‘Argentina! Argentina!’ drove off in a Ford Falcon which was waiting in a no parking zone next to the Banco Nación.”<sup>68</sup>

The Ford Falcon was the vehicle of choice for the armed forces; the implication here is that military or police officials allied with the *juntas* were behind the disruption in an attempt to discredit the Madres and turn the public against them. By fomenting stigmatization of the Madres and accusing them of anti-Argentina motives, the *juntas* actually pushed the Madres farther outside the mainstream, family-centric role they attempted to construct and into a radical role, not only opposed to the dictatorship but opposed to the status quo at large and in line with the radical opposition groups the dictatorship sought to stamp out.

The *juntas*’ fears of the Madres, and the generalized notion of them as subversive anti-Argentine agitators, can be seen in their private archives as well. Early on in the Madres’ activism, the dictatorship had already identified the women as a poignant threat and associated them with opposition activities even when the Madres themselves weren’t involved in the events in question. While searching for information on the Madres’ early activities, I found multiple files labeled “Madres activity,” or “Madres march,” that included fliers produced by different organizations or described events in which a diverse array of opposition groups, not just the Madres, participated.

In one such document from 1981, the file folder subject reads “Madres de Plaza de Mayo” but the flier enclosed is an insert from the socialist magazine *Libertades Democráticas* (“Democratic Freedoms”) sponsored by the Youth Union for Socialism.<sup>69</sup> The text calls for readers to join a march in the Plaza de Mayo organized by coalition of human rights

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<sup>68</sup> “Onlookers break up ‘plaza mums,’” *Buenos Aires Herald*, 23 June 1978.

<sup>69</sup> CPM – FONDO DIPPBA División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa DS, Carpeta Varios, Legajo 20803 II, 2.

organizations, including the more legalistic Center of Legal and Social Studies (CELS) and the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights (APDH) as well as the Madres. The flier, written from a socialist perspective, calls not only for “aparición con vida” (the Madres’ original slogan) but also a struggle in “factories, neighborhoods, universities and high schools... for salaries, against unemployment, and against the surrender to imperialism.”<sup>70</sup> Here, the producer of the flier is an opposition group engaged in the anti-globalist master frame, but they incorporate claims made by the Madres to add the legitimacy of motherism to their own claims. Though this is not the Madres’ own text, it is evidence of compatibility between the master frames.

In another file, a four-page police report labeled “Information related to the ‘Madres de Plaza de Mayo’ mobilization in La Plata” describes a gathering and series of speeches made by solidarity organizations including the Madre and Abuelas as well as the Workers’ Party, Socialist Movement, Intransigent Youth, and alumni of the local university. “Some 250 people, the majority of them youths” attended the event to speak out against the military’s attempted auto-amnesty, the political imprisonment of “anti-oligarchic and anti-imperialist” activists, and “the systematic violation of human rights and its effects of disappearances, deaths and detentions, as well as social and economic effects.”<sup>71</sup> While a few of the Madres did speak at the event, their speeches were not transcribed in the report; instead, the speeches included in the report were politicized leftist claims made by members of other, more radical organizations. Still, the file is again named for the Madres, who by 1983 were a symbol of and leader in resistance.

These documents show that although the Madres did not themselves start making leftist political and economic claims until the late 1980s, the *juntas* perceived them as part and parcel of the subversive threat, and the women were exposed to leftist critiques emanating from their

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

allies since the start of their organization. In the eyes of the *juntas*, the Madres became synonymous with resistance. And the police's tendency to associate the Madres name with the diverse opposition coalition was not a mistake. Once postured against the dictatorship, the women found themselves surrounded by natural allies more than willing to collaborate with or borrow from the Madres to oppose the *juntas* and advance their own causes.

Pamphlets and fliers printed by the Trotskyite Workers' Party in Argentina show that even this far left, economically-minded voice of resistance considered the Madres' cause as an integral part of the revolution to come. A 1981 Workers' Party flier titled "For a great national movement" describes marches and strikes executed by the Madres, CGT, the reform-minded Argentine University Federation, and neighborhood organizations before calling readers to attend what would be the first annual *Marcha de Resistencia* ("Resistance March") organized by the Madres in December of 1981.<sup>72</sup> The flier lists the claims of family members, university students, and the working poor, and ends with a call for unity: "Bring together all claims behind a great national vindication: Out with the dictatorship. For a sovereign and democratic Constitutional Assembly."<sup>73</sup> A flier from the following year advertises a march organized by the CGT, but shows evidence again of respect for, if not collaboration with, the Madres in a list of demands. Most of the claims are economic or related to labor: "against freezing of salaries and pensions;" "security from unemployment;" "repeal of consumption tax;" "end military intervention in labor unions." Then: "Freedom for political prisoners. Appearance with life of the disappeared."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> CPM – FONDO DIPPBA División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa DS, Carpeta Varios, Legajo 18567, 2.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>74</sup> CPM – FONDO DIPPBA División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa DS, Carpeta Varios, Legajo 18905, 3.

This flier and the previous year's show evidence of diverse sectors of Argentina's civil society joining forces to oppose the dictatorship. In this dictatorship-era civil society literature, demands for socialist policies are conspicuously placed next to the Madres' demands for the safe return of their children. Placing their political-economic ideals within the context of the Madres' emotional, life-based claims gave not only a sense of moral authority to the leftist resistance in Argentina, but it also shows the compatibility between the Madres' emotion-laden, maternal framing with the working class anti-globalist frame and platform. This early connection between motherism and popular resistance would be fully expressed after the dictatorship.

### *1983-1988: Seeking Purpose in Democracy*

The end of the dictatorship meant many things to the Madres. Since it meant the end of a non-democratic political system that refused to hear their woes, and the downfall of the military dictators the women blamed for their children's disappearance, it was a great success. At the same time, it represented a moment of crisis in the Madres' organizing purpose. Who now were they to oppose? And since it clear that their motivating purpose would not return with democracy, how could they seek justice for the children they lost?

These questions divided the women. Some desired a practical approach to justice that would work alongside the government to establish reparations; others, led by Hebe de Bonafini, preferred to maintain absolutist demands and a radical approach despite the return of an open system. This conflict led to a schism in 1986 which will be discussed in greater detail later. This section will focus on the more radical branch of the Madres, the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo led by Hebe. Though the other branch (Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Línea Fundadora) has also pursued anti-neoliberal activism, Hebe's is the more radical and less institutionalized in nature, and generally more prominent because of their radical claims, connections to major leftist

organizations, and Hebe's fearless attitude toward controversy. Because her organization has embraced popular anti-globalist and radical leftist framing more, they are the main focus of this argument.

Before the schism, the Madres continued to organize within the motherist activist frame in that their claims concerned justice for their disappeared children. Nevertheless, the usefulness and applicability of the frame grew questionable, as the inspiration—their domain, their children—faded into the past. In *Marchas de Resistencia* in 1981 through 1983, *aparición con vida* appeared in their slogans. In 1984 through 1986, they abandoned this demand, but continued to use slogans that referred to legal procedures and demanded punishment for military men.<sup>75</sup> The abandoning of *aparición con vida* suggests the waning of the constrained, traditional motherism in the Madres' activism, though their continued use of motherist symbolism and moral authority combined with a concern for justice for their children shows that the life- and care-oriented motherist frame was still in use.

By 1988, the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo adopted a new mission and approach to motherism: they decided to pursue their children's political goals as a means of continuing their legacy and honoring their lives. Here we see the first signs of a hybrid of motherism and anti-globalism that would find its fullest expression in the 1990s. In *Carta a Nuestros Hijos* ("Letter to Our Children"), the Madres exclaimed "we will, as always, continue fighting for life," but they presented a new story of their activism:

When many believed that nothing would stop the march of genocide, we went out, to the streets and the world, to fight for your lives. We came to the Plaza...And little by little we began to fight for the same things for which you fought. And as if we were following a parallel destiny, we had to confront, one and a thousand times, the same hated enemy... Today we can say that your fight continues and grows with each new comrade who

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<sup>75</sup> Elizabeth Borland, "The Mature Resistance of Argentina's Madres de Plaza de Mayo," in *Latin American Social Movements: Globalization, Democratization, and Transnational Networks*, 2006, 126.

comes to the Plaza... The fight for freedom is present in each youth, each worker, each militant who learns from you that this is the only path to a world... where there is justice. We will, as always, continue fighting for life, against death, although so many want to make us believe that this system that enslaves and humiliates is the only one possible... Unto the final victory, beloved children!<sup>76</sup>

This final line (in Spanish, “*Hasta la Victoria final!*”) is especially notable because it alludes to communist hero Che Guevara’s famous “*hasta la Victoria siempre,*” which was frequently used by leftist groups throughout Latin America. This reference to the communist revolution is a pointed use of the working-class anti-globalist frame with the purpose of resonating with a broader militant audience. Such framing firmly placed the Asociación Madres in the context of a continuing leftist revolutionary movement.

Beyond this tongue-in-cheek reference to communist revolution, the letter also suggests an evolved motherism in that it alludes to a new way of reviving the lives of the Madres’ children: keeping up the fight for liberation. In framing their political activity in this way, the Madres could maintain the moral authority of the motherist frame while also accessing the rhetoric and tactics of a never-ending path to liberation embedded in the radical anti-globalist frame. In this letter, the Madres established themselves as revolutionary mothers, and crafted a hybrid form of radical motherist activism imbued with Argentine anti-globalism that would find its fullest expression during Menem’s presidency.

#### *1989-2003: Radical Women*

After separating from the more institutionalized Línea Fundadora, Hebe and the Asociación Madres began to embrace a full-fledged radical anti-globalist frame in 1989. In this year, Peronist Carlos Saúl Menem was elected and assumed the presidency months before

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<sup>76</sup> CPM – FONDO DIPPBA División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa DE, Factor Social, Carpeta Entidades Varias, Legajo 617, 2.



originally intended amidst hyperinflation and a recession. Though Menem had promised a productive revolution, he quickly invited conservative economists into his administration and embraced liberal Washington Consensus policies in an attempt to stabilize inflation and invite foreign investment. The result was an “identity crisis” within Peronism, in which the traditional rapport between the masses and the Peronist party elite disappeared and the militant left was left to fend for anti-globalism in a restrictive democracy.<sup>77</sup>

Hebe expressed anger following Menem’s betrayal during the *Marcha de Resistencia* of that year: “The Government lies, Menem prostitutes himself to the military men, the military men increase their pay, our representatives too, and we are every time worse off.”<sup>78</sup> Yet she remained resolute, alluding again to the path of revolution: “We don’t want positions nor even a place within the system. Organization and mobilization is the only path the people have to change unjust realities.”<sup>79</sup> This uncompromising position again echoes a revolutionary leftist framing: Hebe’s distrust for the government, her stated goal to change the whole system and advocacy for popular mobilization reflect a desire to resonate with and mobilize the working class.

Also present at the 1989 *Marcha* was the organization *Familiares de Desaparecidos y Detenidos por Razones Políticas* (Relatives of the Disappeared and Detained for Political Reasons), another practitioner of the motherist activist frame and frequent affiliate of the Madres. As attendee groups often did, the Familiares introduced some of their own slogans and chants to the march; in addition to the Madres’ official “We won’t forget, we won’t forgive,” they demanded “Stop hunger and unemployment,” and announced, “the detained-disappeared

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<sup>77</sup> “Crisis de identidad,” *Página 12*, 13 August 1989.

<sup>78</sup> “24 horas de resistencia al olvido y al perdón en la Plaza de Mayo,” *Página 12*, 7 December 1989.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

continue being a rallying cry for the liberation of the Argentine people.”<sup>80</sup> Though these claims were made by a different motherist/familial activist group from the Madres, the setting of their *Marcha* to make socioeconomic protest claims signifies a shift in the use of the motherist frame from issues related strictly to their children to generalizable, progressive social critiques. A new, economically and socially conscious form of motherism was emerging.

In 1990, the Asociación Madres issued an “Open Letter to the Politicians that Govern” that decried the imperialist influences of the United States and referenced leftist scholar Eduardo Galeano’s *Open Veins of Latin America*. *Open Veins* is a landmark book that describes the history of Latin America and the adverse effects of European and U.S. imperialism; it is a pillar of Latin American leftism and anti-globalism. The Madres’ letter states that Galeano’s words “help us to understand what happened before, when they made disappear 30,000 popular militants who were fighting against the plans of the U.S., and what is happening today, when an explicitly liberal government proposes to make poor people disappear by murdering them with hunger.”<sup>81</sup> With this framing, the Madres assign the causal blame for their children’s death to the same enemy as the anti-globalist, working class left: imperialist exploitation. By framing their grievances as an effect of the same enemy as radical leftist protesters, the Madres created new opportunities to critique that enemy, resonate with the working class and engage with more sophisticated popular motherist critiques.

Clearly, by this point the Madres embraced the anti-globalist frame. But their language does more than just that; they argue that the culprit for their initial grievance is the same as that behind the economic crisis. By equating the effects of the liberal democratic government’s

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<sup>80</sup> “Nueva Marcha de la Resistencia de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo,” *Página 12*, 5 December 1989.

<sup>81</sup> CPM – FONDO DIPPBA División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa DE, Factor Social, Carpeta Entidades Varias, Legajo 579, 2.

economic austerity with the disappearances of the dictatorship, the Madres extend their moral authority on behalf of the disappeared into the present. Just as they invented the motherist activist frame during the dictatorship by claiming moral authority over political matters via their relationship to the victims, they here claim moral authority over economic matters by claiming to protect the Argentine poor.

The letter continues, “The day is already arriving when the Argentine people will not be resigned to watching their children die of hunger.” Here the Madres speak not only for the dictatorship disappeared, but for all the children of Argentina; if the culprit for their own children’s disappearance is still operating, “murdering” its victims “with hunger,” then it continues to be a threat to all the children of Argentina. Rather than retroactively seeking their own children, they now frame themselves as proactive advocates for all the children of Argentina via anti-globalist ends. Their radical anti-globalist motherism takes on national proportions.

In 1992, a flier for the Asociación Madres on the 16<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the last military coup again decried imperialism and made even more explicitly socialist claims: “For us, democracy is for the great majority of the population, those that produce, the working class... against capitalism, we counterpose socialism.”<sup>82</sup> Another from this year ended, “¡Venceremos!” or, “We will overcome,” another phrase lifted from revolutionary leftist rhetoric meant to resonate with the working class.

In the 1994 *Marcha*, Hebe described a socialist ideal for society, inspired by her children: “Our children’s struggle will be over when the people have work, education, health and can eat, and to advance this we must fight, for this we organize so that our children speak through our

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<sup>82</sup> CPM – FONDO DIPPBA División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa DE, Factor Social, Carpeta Varios, Legajo 541, Tomo II, 2.

actions to the workers who lead the fight and to the youth.”<sup>83</sup> This framing is important for two reasons: first, it is an example of the Madres using the domain over their children as a justification for taking part in leftist critiques.

Second, the framing showed the Madres’ framing themselves as mothers, protectors, and promoters of resistance. The Asociación Madres’ goal was to speak through their own activism on behalf of their radical children to encourage the workers and youths of the modern era to fight for socialism and anti-globalism. Hebe envisioned her motherist work as not only protection, but direct encouragement of engagement and militancy in traditional anti-globalist base. The Madres had lost their own anti-globalist children; now, their work was to create a new militant generation.

And the Madres did make an impression on the youth; the same year, a *Página 12* article described the “labyrinth of identities” at the *Marcha* and claimed, “the kids and the old people make a fairly homogenous group.”<sup>84</sup> At the 1995 *Marcha*, the Madres were accompanied by young activists representing the children of the disappeared, newly organized in the group HIJOS. From their start, the activists of HIJOS made it clear they intended to join the Madres on their radical path: “We are here, they wanted for us to be the children of nobody, but today we are fighters, children of fighters.”<sup>85</sup> Just as the Madres had framed their resistance as arising from their children, the HIJOS framed their activism as a generational phenomenon, a product of their parents’ experience. HIJOS was unafraid of radical protest from the beginning; their public denunciations of former repressors made headlines and instigated public outrage by bringing to

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> “Laberinto de la identidad y el Arca de las Madres en la Marcha,” *Página 12*, 8 December 1994.

<sup>85</sup> “Tres generaciones en marcha,” *Página 12*, 8 December 1995.

light the extent of impunity for dictatorship crimes. Like the Madres, these were individuals committed to activism whose framing of issues was embedded in a familial frame.

Surely, the formation of HIJOS arose from the group's own collective identity, but the significance of this moment for the Madres and motherist activism can hardly be understated. If the Madres had not continued their activism, but rather faded to irrelevance as democracy settled and the economy fluctuated, would their grandchildren have been so motivated to organize for justice for their parents in such radical ways? The emergence of HIJOS represented the potential of familial militancy, and the potential for the temporal versatility of master frames and the potential for intergenerational activism.

*Página 12* invited youths to conduct interviews and write short reflections at the 1995 *Marcha*. 12-year-olds Milagros Chavez and Micaela Sourigues wrote “in this space that the Madres opened, many people can complain about things that happen, without it having to do with the disappeared.”<sup>86</sup> They continue: “[A Madre] from Entre Ríos told us that she was there... so that our mothers wouldn't have to cry for us, like her for her child. To the Madres who give and gave so much for us, the children, and their children, we want to say thank you for so many days of struggle.”<sup>87</sup> This line nicely sums up the sentimentality many Argentines feel for the Madres, as well as the effectiveness of their motherist frame. By this point—near a major episode of contention in Argentina—the Madres' framing of themselves as protectors and caretakers of resistance was so effective that children looked up to them as though they were family. The Madres' activism was no longer for their own children, but for all of Argentina.

As economic malaise continued to fester and the century came to a close, the Asociación Madres maintained a hard-left stance, even openly criticizing the Línea Fundadora for their

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<sup>86</sup> “Tantos días de lucha,” *Página 12*, 6 December 1996.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

practical approach and justifying their own radical agenda by referencing their “children who bore arms because they wanted to defend their country against an attack by the external enemy.”<sup>88</sup> They still signaled moral authority by referencing their children, and they believed they were protecting all Argentina’s children, but they were growing more controversial as well.

In 2001, the Asociación Madres and the Línea Fundadora attended the *Marcha* separately, though both embraced a hybrid motherist/anti-globalist slogan that highlighted their anti-neoliberal stance with justification bolstered by their motherist moral authority. The Línea Fundadora and their affiliates claimed: “Yesterday we resisted the genocidal dictatorship, today we resist economic genocide. Our fight: Memory, Truth, Justice and not one poor home in Argentina.”<sup>89</sup> By framing their mission as a continuation of fighting against genocide, they heighten the emotional resonance of their claims and link back to the motherist frame of the dictatorship. This shows that the LF Madres, like the Asociación, is committed to leftist critiques, but it suggests that their framing is rooted more in original motherism.

This suggests not only a commitment to the motherist frame, but a desire to justify activism via moral authority by placing modern social problems in the context of the dictatorship. The Asociación Madres, on the other hand, used the slogan, “Resistance and fight against State terrorism, fight against the lack of work and fight against the rich.”<sup>90</sup> A report also shows that Hebe “announced that they would be accompanied by groups of unemployed people to carry out a joint mobilization ‘against impunity’ and in demand for sources of work.” Though the Madres continued organizing on the issue of impunity, their direct action—a joint mobilization with the *desocupados* at the center of the protest cycle—is evidence of their

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<sup>88</sup> CPM – FONDO DIPPBA División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa DS, Carpeta Varios, Legajo 37415, 8.

<sup>89</sup> “XXI Marcha de la Resistencia,” *Página 12*, 5 December 2001.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

willingness to expand motherist authority to working class issues. This action suggests that Hebe and the Asociación Madres were no longer concerned with carefully constructing motherist moral authority with a framing rooted solely in their own children's lives and struggle, but rather they were concerned with the urgency and radicalness of the anti-globalist fight on behalf of Argentina's poor and unemployed.

*2003-Present: "Somos hijos de las Madres"*

In 2001 Argentina suffered an economic meltdown that would only worsen unemployment and inflation. De la Rúa's popularity plummeted, the country went through a quick succession of other radical and Peronist presidents. The resulting riots and protests—deemed the *Argentinaazo*—showed widespread rejection of capitalistic neoliberal policies and a resurgence of the anti-globalist frame.

The Madres often celebrate the anniversary of their first meeting in the Plaza in April with an anniversary march. In April of 2003, a flier from the Asociación Madres stated: "State terrorism is always organized by officials at the service of economic interests. They want to make us slaves... [we] think that the unemployed are the new disappeared of the system."<sup>91</sup> This quote represents yet another step along the path of motherist/anti-globalist synthesis; a moment in which the Madres are not justifying their claims with reference to their children, or the children of Argentina, but are in fact identifying the unemployed with their own children, and equating the experiences of political and economic repression. The Madres' new anti-globalist motherism framed themselves as protectors and caretakers of the youth, the poor, the unemployed: all those facing political, social, or economic oppression, who may need another voice on their side. They became the mothers of Argentina.

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<sup>91</sup> Borland, "Mature resistance," 125.

A month later, leftist Peronist and social democrat Néstor Kirchner became President. Kirchner was a former lawyer who was criticized for doing little in resistance to the dictatorship 20 years earlier and was elected during a time of dire economic crisis and political unrest; thus, human rights organizations expected little in terms of justice from his presidency.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, his leftist political stance was promising, and from the earliest days of his presidency he signaled an intention to change the country's stance on human rights issues. His administration and his successor's, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, even the radical Asociación Madres' radical mobilizing waned in favor of cooperation with the presidents.

Kirchner accepted and espoused the "Memory, Truth, and Justice" claim of the human rights organizations; one of his first moves as president was to force the military top leadership to retire, something the Madres, HIJOS and others had demanded for decades.<sup>93</sup> Later, in September of 2003, he delivered an address to the United Nations describing his policy plans for Argentina. On the subject of human rights, he announced:

The defense of human rights occupies a central place in the new agenda of the Republic of Argentina. We are the children of the Madres and Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo. And for this we insist on supporting a permanent means of enforcing an international system of protection of human rights and prosecution and conviction of those who violate them.<sup>94</sup>

The Madres' national-level motherist frame had been recognized by Argentina's head of state in front of the world. Although Kirchner's statement had little to do with the anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism inherent to the Madres' new agenda, by identifying them as the mothers of Argentina, he reiterated their moral authority and afforded them national reverence.

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<sup>92</sup> Francesca Lessa and Leigh A. Payne, *Amnesty in the Age of Human Rights Accountability: Comparative and International Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 114.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>94</sup> "Néstor Kirchner, 2003: 'Somos hijos de las Madres y Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo,'" *Tiempo Argentino*, 21 September 2016, Accessed 11 March 2018, <https://www.tiempoar.com.ar/articulo/view/60464/na-stor-kirchner-2003-somos-hijos-de-las-madres-y-abuelas-de-plaza-de-mayo>



Kirchner's intention at the UN was likely to signify solidarity with human rights organizations, whom he clearly supported—while there, he ratified the UN Convention on the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity. He also reversed Argentina's stance on extraditions, allowing 45 military members to be extradited to face human rights violations charges in Spain, and led the Congress in nullifying Alfonsín's amnesty laws and Menem's pardons.<sup>95</sup>

Nevertheless, Kirchner's words indicated support for the Madres' position as the "official" mothers of Argentina. The nationalist, anti-globalist, motherist activist master frame that the women had cultivated over 25 years—which positioned them as the protectors of Argentina's future generations, and the mothers of militancy itself—was recognized by the head of state and elevated to an international arena. With this quote, Kirchner indicated that he would not stigmatize the radical Madres as Menem and Alfonsín had, but rather would hear their critiques and work with them. It was a major success for the Madres' anti-globalist motherism that opened the possibility of cooperation.

The Madres welcomed a partnership with the government and broke from militancy during part of the Kirchner presidencies. At their last annual *Marcha de Resistencia* in 2006, Hebe claimed, "the enemy is no longer in the House of Government, the enemy inhabits the multinationals"<sup>96</sup> The women would not stop organizing altogether, as their enemies of imperialism and capitalism still threatened their nation's children, but would announced their intention to officially work with the government for the first time instead of critiquing it. Hebe admitted, "we are missing many things, but we think that this is the moment to build."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Lessa and Payne, *Amnesty*, 115.

<sup>96</sup> Alejandra Dandan, "Acto final para una marcha de 25 años," *Página 12*, 27 January 2006.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

And build they did. In January of 2007, the Asociación Madres received an award from the government for \$24 million pesos (nearly \$8 million USD) to build 450 low-income housing units in the Los Piletones slum of the Villa Soldati neighborhood. The initiative, developed by the Asociación's Universidad Popular de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo, planned to employ and house poor individuals in the neighborhood, construct schools, and make aesthetic improvements. A lawyer of the Madres, Sergio Schoklender stated, "The Madres think that of course it's important to prosecute repressors, they delegate this job to their lawyers and they are concentrating in efforts for education, construction of schools and creation of genuine jobs."<sup>98</sup> Here the Madres' spokesperson uses their hybrid popular motherist framing to explain their decision to institutionalize. Their role as caretakers and protectors was most important to them, so they sought to fulfill it via a state partner who bought into the popular motherist identity.

The Madres would not retain this friendly position with the government for long; when more conservative Mauricio Macri was elected president in 2015, the Madres lost their institutional connection and returned to their radical activism directly opposed to the government. But for a while, they worked directly with the government, not only advocating for social services for the poor but becoming directly involved in providing homes and schools.

Though for many the end of a social movement is its institutionalization, the Madres' work remained embedded in the popular motherist frame. They were not consigned to the civil society sphere, but rather occupied a position of direct authority over social services, and were able to implement the maternalistic program for shelter and education that they advocated. They were not championing the working class only in discourse, but were directly caring for the Argentine poor, their children, just as mothers should. Further, when a new adversary came to

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<sup>98</sup> Gabriel Sued, "Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo harán casas en Los Piletones," *La Nación*, 10 January 2007.

power, the Madres again did not fade into obscurity but rather have returned to a central radical role in contention, deploying their popular anti-globalist framing in 21<sup>st</sup> century critiques.

### Conclusion

I have theorized the concept of master frame hybridization and shown that the Madres were an example of this practice. Master frames are collective action frames arising from historical and political context that offer social movements tactics and rhetorical strategies to resonate with society. When movement actors elect to uptake actions from two different master frames, and develop the ability to frame movement claims in this hybridized way, the claim not only resonates with more individuals in society but also takes on new meaning as an issue of concern for more than one audience.

The evolution of the Madres shows us how master frames can be invented, recuperated, redesigned and synthesized over a long time period to help movements remain relevant and achieve their goals in the long run. The Madres were able to uptake two distinct master frames from their environment and combine them to construct an innovative, hybridized form of popular motherist activism; as a result, they not only maintained the resonance of motherist anger, but communicated with a leftist audience and expand into political-economic critiques. Now we will turn to the question of the interaction context—and specifically, transformative events and the emotions they stir up—to identify significant moments in which motherism and anti-globalism clashed, intersected, and emerged redefined.

### Chapter Three: Events and Emotions

In the previous chapter, I presented a theory of frame hybridization to illustrate how the Madres were able to combine their own motherist tactical frame with a robust popular protest frame to make progressively more radical/leftist claims in a way that was resonant and interpretively comprehensible to Argentine society. This resonance was accomplished because the Madres were able to make use of master frames available from cultural epochs of contention, and because they contributed long-term change processes by challenging their collective identity.

This chapter centers on the shorter-term interaction context of the Madres: the protest cycles and transformative events that establish perceived injustices and crystallize the collective efficacy that drives a social movement. I argue that a central phenomenon contributing to the Madres' collective efficacy was a sense of intergenerational emotion that provided them with means of communicating the stakes and purpose of insurgency with younger generations of activists, augmenting both the reach of their influence and their moral authority. In particular, I highlight a sense of popular motherist anger that arose from the Madres' emotional agency in adopting a sense of popular anger permeating Argentine society in the 1980s and 1990s.

Emotion is a vehicle for the expression of collective or individual identity in response to an event or experience that sparks opportunities for meaning-making and collective efficacy. The events of the world only become perceived injustices—an impetus to action and opportunity for insurgency—via the collective emotional process of meaning-making, framing, and justifying claims against a structural adversary. In *Passionate Politics*, Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper and Francesca Polletta note that emotions have implications for social roles: "Gender roles are especially laden with emotional expectations, as women are expected to do more and different

kinds of 'emotion work' in most societies."<sup>99</sup> In the case of Argentine civil society, the Madres held not only a leadership role but also the gendered role of mothers, and they acted as a significant source of emotion production and definition. Their protest was, after all, an emotional enterprise, sparked and sustained by love translated into anger.

After generating such sentiment and attention in their work during the dictatorship, the Madres held a great deal of influence over emotion and meaning-making in Argentine civil society. They leveraged this influence to revitalize and repurpose their motherist emotion for the democratic context, incorporating the affect and emotion of popular anger produced by transformative events and protest cycles into their own emotional habitus. The result of this emotional agency was an intergenerational sense of motherism in which the Madres' emotional domain included not only their own children, but younger generations of Argentine as well. In particular, I highlight popular motherist anger—a long-term, righteous sense of anger rising from a sense of domain over the wellbeing of children and the working poor.

Short-term factors are not the only temporalities that influence affect and emotion. On the contrary, beliefs about long-term change processes and collective moods that accompany epochs of contention can play a role in defining the emotional habitus of an individual or group.<sup>100</sup> These factors especially play a role in shaping collective identity by changing the configuration of actors and opportunity structure. I likewise do not dismiss the relevance of these long-standing experiences of emotions, nor the feedback effects between long-held emotions and short-term opportunities for expression. Rather, I show how long-term emotions can be adapted, augmented,

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<sup>99</sup> Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta, *Passionate Politics*, 14.

<sup>100</sup> I borrow the term “emotional habitus” from Deborah Gould, meaning a collective emotional disposition that gives groups a “sense of the game”— a way to interpreting events and emotions, and an idea of how to resonate with the public. Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and Act Up's Fight Against AIDS*, (University of Chicago Press: 2009), 33.

and evolved as a result of a collective's immediate responses to perceived injustices in the short term. By focusing on these shorter temporalities, I hope to highlight how perceptible political and economic changes induced moral shock that not only sparked a protest reaction, but also allowed the Madres to pursue new opportunities of emotion- and meaning-making in evoking a popular motherist anger that justified their hybridized popular, anti-globalist motherist frame. This chapter proceeds as follows: first, I will review the short-term temporalities that inform the interaction cycle and inspire emotional response; second, I will theorize a sense of maternal emotion and morality; and finally, I will the Madres' emotional evolution and response to the interaction context, with particular attention to the intergenerational growth of their emotional domain and the construction of popular motherist anger.

#### The Interaction Context and Short Temporalities

There are two types of temporal events within the interaction context that may influence affect and emotion: transformative events and protest cycles. The former includes isolated moments and events that signify a structural turning point. Such an event may change an individual's affect and emotion such that they experience moral shock and are driven to act. A transformative event may be, but is not necessarily, a suddenly-imposed grievance. Clearly, the sudden disappearance of one or more children was an enormous grievance that drove the Madres to act against the antagonists in a closed political structure.

The second temporality that plays a major role in the interaction context is protest cycle, or periods of time defined by increased protest activity, radicalization, and patterns of heightened contention. Roberta Villalón has identified four major episodes of contentious politics in 20th century Argentine history that informed the Madres and would inform radical activism in the 1990s and early 2000s as well: the radical civil rights movement of the early 20th century; the

labor rights movement of the mid-1940s; the “proliferation of alternative political groups” such as the Peronist guerrilla organization the Montoneros in the late 1960s and 1970s; and finally the “democratic activist civil society organizations” such as the Madres of the dictatorship era.<sup>101</sup>

When the Madres spoke out against the dictatorship, they took part in the expansion of protest and the transformation of the social identity of motherhood; in doing this, they contributed to a wave of contention. This rich history of contention, Villalón argues, “played a key role as references” to new claim-makers and would provide further inspiration to the Madres as they grew into their role as influential political actors in the post-dictatorship era.

### Emotional Habitus and Motherhood

Emotion is the factor mediating between the interaction context—protest cycles and events—and the configuration of actors—the individuals making claims—because it informs collective identity and communicates the meaning and stakes of insurgency. In a world where injustices and resources to combat them exist, individuals are moved to make claims against a perceived oppressor not because it is easy or profitable to change the status quo, but because perceived injustices inspire an emotional reaction. The way in which a group is disposed to act in such a situation is determined by emotional habitus, or a collective emotional disposition that gives groups a “sense of the game”—a means of interpreting events and emotions, and an idea of how to resonate with the broader public.<sup>102</sup>

I borrow the concept of emotional habitus from Deborah Gould’s *Moving Politics*, in which she argues that AIDS activists were able to “turn grief into anger” due to a shift in the group’s emotional habitus.<sup>103</sup> The emotional habitus of a grouping describes the range of political

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<sup>101</sup> Villalón, “Neoliberalism,” 141.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 8.

feelings and actions that a social movement or collective civil society can be disposed to take up. These political feelings comprise both affect, which comprises the nonconscious experience of “bodily energy” arising from stimuli; and emotion, also known as affects actualized, or personal expressions of feelings.<sup>104</sup> Gould argues that bodily and social affective states can be altered by transformative events, resulting in the formation of new political feelings and the evolution of emotional habitus. In her example of the direct-action ACT UP movement against AIDS, the “bodily intensities” of “dread, piercing grief, utter frustration, anxiety about the future, intensifying anger,” combined with a sense of urgency and collective efficacy following the *Bowers v. Hardwick* Supreme Court Case of 1986, changed LGBTQ activists’ emotional habitus and allowed them to “turn grief into anger” and mobilize highly emotional activism.<sup>105</sup>

When events or protest cycles trigger affective shifts or moral shocks, the emotional habitus of social groupings and civil society can transform. I argue that this occurred in Argentina, when inflamed anger over impunity and impending economic crises created a sense of political-economic panic that gave the Madres an opportunity to utilize new expressions of emotion and meaning-making to reinvent their political motherhood identity.

Emotions may be short-term, as in surprise or grief, or longer-term, as in love and hate.<sup>106</sup> They can be highly personal and focused on a specific object, as in affective bonds between movement members, or indignation over a child’s disappearance; or felt on a national level, as in moods that lack a specific object but charge the political atmosphere. These specific object emotions are like anger as described by Marilyn Frye: they are “righteous” in that they imply “a claim to a domain;” a “sense of the rightness or propriety of your position and your interest in

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 172-175; 8.

<sup>106</sup> Goodwin et al., *Passionate Politics*, 10-11.



whatever has been hindered, interfered with or harmed.”<sup>107</sup> Anger specifically require the feeler to place blame, whether causal or remedial, as an adversary target of outrage.<sup>108</sup> These righteous emotions color activists’ framing of their claims by creating justification for perceived injustice and opportunities for framing.

### Maternal Emotion and Morality

The Madres’ anger stemmed from their domain over their children, but this is not the only emotion they expressed; rather, the Madres utilized a range of maternal emotions arising from their maternal domain in order to process and justify theirs and others’ actions. Their sense of motherist anger, which arose first from grief, was perhaps the most perceptible emotion in the Madres’ initial claims to action as well as their increasingly radical and urgent claims over time. Nevertheless, their sense of grief, pride, and love, among other maternal emotions, all played a role in communicating their claims to the public.

The common root of this range of maternal emotions is the sense of emotional domain described by Frye and experienced by mothers on behalf of their children. That “sense of rightness or propriety” of the Madres’ position as mothers entailed a deep concern for and emotional commitment to the wellbeing of their children. This arose not only from the cultural experience of motherhood and *marianismo* in Argentina, but also from an evolved sense of feminine and maternal morality.

Carol Gilligan first described a distinct concept of morality experienced by women and mothers in a study of women’s psychological development and experience with abortion in *In a Different Voice*. She suggests that women’s morality is defined by commitment to interpersonal

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<sup>107</sup> Marilyn Frye, “A Note on Anger,” *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, 1983, 86.

<sup>108</sup> James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 118.

relationship and constructs “the moral problem as a problem of care and responsibility in relationships rather than as one of rights and rules.”<sup>109</sup> Gilligan conducts a series of interviews where she traces the development of women’s sense of morality by examining the moral decision of abortion, and argues that women’s experience of moral decision-making alters their self-concept and perspective of the conflict between self and other. As women are faced with the question of an unborn child, they first assume “maternal morality that seeks to ensure care for the dependent and unequal.”<sup>110</sup>

As women embark on the moral decision of abortion, women face the responsibility of choice in the “most private sector of the woman’s domain, causing them to reconsider the central moral problem of conflict between self and other. The final product of this transitional process, the development of self-concept and morality, is an “understanding of the interconnection between other and self.”<sup>111</sup> The result is “not a new morality, but a morality disentangled from the constraints that formerly confused its perception and impeded its articulation.”<sup>112</sup>

The Madres’ own sense of morality at the start of their activism was defined by that central sense of “maternal morality,” the domain over their children.<sup>113</sup> But just as Gilligan’s subjects’ conception of morality changed over time with their concept of self and capacity for decision-making, the Madres’ obligation to traditional, apolitical maternal emotion and morality faded away as they embraced an intergenerational collective identity and an emotional habitus emboldened by popular anger and perceived injustice.

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<sup>109</sup> Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Harvard University Press, 1982), 103.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

Gilligan concludes: "The moral imperative that emerges repeatedly in interviews with women is an injunction to care, a responsibility to discern and alleviate the 'real and recognizable trouble' of this world."<sup>114</sup> In her seminal work on female consciousness and collective action, Temma Kaplan makes a similar observation: "the bedrock of women's consciousness is the need to preserve life." Kaplan analyzes the actions of women in Spain during and before World War I to show that when the state "was not aiding them to fulfill their role as nurturers, women in Barcelona and elsewhere confronted the state to demand their rights as mothers." To these women denied access to their purported moral imperative, the very purpose of motherism changes from a passive goal of care to an active, political defense of the *right* to care and provide.

The Madres consistently return to this rhetoric of care by communicating the meaning and stakes of their insurgency in terms of their children and their intergenerational motherist domain. In the absence of their children, the moral-maternal process of caretaking transforms into a process of demanding "rights as mothers," that is, the right to love and care for a child. The disappearance of their children did not indicate a stopping point for the Madres' female consciousness and maternal moral imperative of caretaking, but rather provided a pathway through which care could become a political act and confrontation against the state. By continuously redefining their collective identity and embracing the emotional opportunities created by short-term decision-making, the Madres constructed an evolved sense of maternal morality based on the broader domain of their children and the Argentine poor.

### The Madres and Maternal Emotion

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 100.

When the government denied them justice, instead legislating pardons for military oppressors, the Madres' anger—the violation of the mother domain, and a sense of retributive blame—re-emerged directed at not only the *juntas*, but the Alfonsín regime as well. Further, their activism was energized and magnified by a national-level affect shift that changed their emotional habitus: a sense of political-economic panic generated by economic and financial crises and a resentful military that threatened to undo democracy. The Madres had generated power and influence over the emotional habitus of society by the meaning-making of their motherist activism against the dictatorship; now, they channeled that power again, incorporating the affect of political-economic panic into motherist anger, generating new political feelings and a practice of popular political motherism.

#### *Motherist Anger Under Dictatorship*

During and after the dictatorship, the Madres played the role of articulators and mobilizers of emotion and meaning. By the time of democratic transition, they were idols of womanhood and resistance. A flier from International Women's Day in 1984 shows how Argentine society—especially women—revered the Madres' example: "In Argentina we have the pride of counting on those who have been the example of struggle and organization in recent years: the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. They have been the very first figures in the resistance."<sup>115</sup>

These women became symbols of resistance and a source of pride because they were symbols of emotion: a righteous range of maternal emotions, and a radical anger sparked by a grievance that placed remedial blame for harm to the Madres' children on the dictators.

During the dictatorship, the Madres gained influence and power within Argentine civil society and abroad via their production of emotion and meaning in activism. In their highly

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<sup>115</sup> CPM – FONDO DIPPBA División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa Referencia, Legajo 18235, 2.

symbolic walks around the Plaza de Mayo and travels abroad adorned in white headscarves, they embodied the perfect grieving mother appearance that inspired their motherist frame. This image arose from the Catholic symbol of the *mater dolorosa*, an image of the Virgin Mary defined by the sorrows in her life. The motherhood ideal was caring, emotion-laden, but not political; it emphasized “submissiveness, purity, devotion to children, and moral strength.”<sup>116</sup> To bring forth their claims, and justify their presence in the Plaza de Mayo, the Madres first expressed the expected and culturally accepted emotion of maternal grief for their children. The resonance of this emotion was a key to their successful mobilization.

A testament to the roots of their activism in maternal emotion is that even when confronted with special opportunities for political-economic protest, the Madres maintained their strictly motherist claims and framing. In April of 1983, the Group of 77, a UN coalition of developing nations, convened on Buenos Aires. The Madres showed up not to raise concerns about imperialism or the *juntas*’ capitalistic, pro-Washington economic policies, but rather to air that motherist anger. They carried posters with inscriptions such as “Crimes cannot go unpunished,” and “Appearance with life is essential, and punishment for the guilty.”<sup>117</sup> By this point, the Madres’ practice of the motherist frame had gained such notoriety as a symbol of peace and moral authority that the police had “orders not to repress” the protest.<sup>118</sup>

Regardless, the women received no answer to their original claim. As they gained greater influence nationally and internationally, they grew increasingly frustrated by the unrelieved violation of their maternal domain. Their success in communicating grief to mobilize a maternal collective identity now inspired them to embrace the righteousness of their maternal domain and

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<sup>116</sup> Shabliy, “The Women’s Resistance Movement,” 85-86.

<sup>117</sup> “Protesta imprevista,” *Clarín*, 9 April 1983.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

moral authority and embrace another maternal emotion: anger. A Madres' flier from 1982 signed by Hebe de Bonafini and others shows their shift from grief to anger in their increasingly contentious rhetoric: "WE DENOUNCE the kidnapping of our children... WE ACCUSE the Armed Forces... WE DEMAND judgment for those responsible for these grave acts" (emphasis in original).<sup>119</sup> Rather than remaining rooted in grief, the Madres now acted on the infringement of their maternal domain by assigning blame and establishing an adversary and target of their outrage.

The Madres spoke out in April 1983 when Monsignor Antonio Quarracino endorsed Archbishop Juan Carlos Aramburu's suggestion of amnesty, and proposed a *ley de olvido* (law to forget) as a prerequisite. He argued, "Argentine society should say in some manner or another that we are all guilty," and cautioned against using the *desaparecidos* as a theme in political or ideological debates.<sup>120</sup> The suggestion that the Madres held even some of the blame for their children's disappearance was infuriating. Not only did it question the sanctity of their maternal domain, but to many it was a continuation of the betrayal of the Catholic Church on the subject of the disappeared. Many Madres were themselves Catholic; their original devout maternal frame was not only for the sake of resonance but the product of their individual emotions and identities.

This betrayal sparked a shift for the Madres' sense of maternal emotion, no longer rooted purely in grief nor directed solely at the military. They were "incredulous and astonished" by the Monsignor's endorsement and blasted the Catholic dogma protecting former repressors who confessed "not only their pride for their actions but their willingness to repeat them if it were necessary," yet remain unpunished.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> CPM – FONDO DIPPBA División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa DS, Carpeta Varios, Legajo 20803, Tomo IV, 2.

<sup>120</sup> Michael A. Burdick, *For God and Fatherland: Religion and Politics in Argentina* (SUNY Press, 1995), 229.

<sup>121</sup> "Replican Madres de Plaza de Mayo," *Clarín*, 9 April 1983.

The indignant Madres demanded, “Why ignore this part of our history and not others? What determines this selectivist principle?” Further, they revealed another profound source of emotion—an expansion of their domain—fueling their protest: if the children of the disappeared were found, they argued, they needed “to know the truth with respect to the fate of their parents.”<sup>122</sup> Though not a direct example of anger, this shows that the Madres’ affective bonds for their grandchildren—and feelings of regret over the future of their children—were significant sources of emotion for them. Although they were still firmly positioned within a motherist frame, they now used a forward-looking, intergenerational sense of maternal emotion to bring meaning to their motherism. It suggested that the Madres’ domain was no longer only their children but included their grandchildren as well.

Further, the Madres’ grandchildren occupied an existentially ambiguous position; on the one hand, many disappeared women were pregnant at the time of their kidnapping, and witnesses reported incidents of births in clandestine detention centers. On the other hand, it was unclear at the time whether infants were killed or given away, by whom they may have been adopted, or whether they could be delivered safely in the horrific conditions of clandestine detention. The Madres were unsure of the existence of their grandchildren, but they were still angry and still made claims for their grandchildren’s sake; in a sense, the domain of their anger and maternal emotion started to reach not only their progeny but the unsure fates of all children of the future.

These examples show, on the one hand, the success of their motherist frame as a tactic and on the other hand, that their protest in the context of the dictatorship was directed at the *juntas* and the military’s allies. These examples also show that the Madres during this time were motivated by a more confined maternal emotional domain; even though their anger started to test

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

the limits by making intergenerational claims, they remained focused on concerns directly related to their children's lives and legacies. In the years that followed, the continued violation of the Madres' original maternal domain combined with national-level emotional resources would reenergize and redefine their anger.

### *Anger in Democracy: Moving Targets*

Alfonsín and the shift to democracy represented hope, especially since he repealed the dictators' auto-amnesty laws and appointed a truth commission (CONADEP) to investigate human rights abuses in his first days in office. Discontent within the military swelled immediately: declassified State Department and FBI documents indicate that tensions between the military and the new government were on edge from the very first months of Alfonsín's presidency.<sup>123</sup>

CONADEP's report, *Nunca Más*, was premised on the "theory of two demons," which suggested shared blame between the military and leftist guerrilla groups for the violence of the 1970s and 1980s. Nevertheless, it reported at least 8,961 disappeared persons, and described in detail the disproportionate and grotesque role of the military in systematized human rights violations. The report had enormous implications in legal recourse for individuals who had waited years to know what happened to their disappeared; soon, cases for human rights violations were brought to lower-level courts.

Political commentators noted the indignation of lower-level officers facing court would "provoke political upset for this government."<sup>124</sup> The fear over what a discontented military

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<sup>123</sup> 19831229, "Alfonsín Pushes Ahead with Curbs on Argentine Military," retrieved from the NSA William & Mary Internship Data Set; accessed 12 May 2018; 19840313, "Assessment of the Situation Existing Between the Armed Forces and the Civilian Government: Issues of Concern to the Armed Forces: Problems Facing the Chief of Staff of the Army," retrieved from the NSA William & Mary Internship Data Set; accessed 12 May 2018.

<sup>124</sup> "La tensión por el informe Sabato," *Clarín*, 23 September 1984.



would do in such a fragile, young democracy drove many to the doctrine of reconciliation. To the military, that meant amnesty: “The idea is newly circulating in military media to pressure to obtain amnesty for the intermediate cadres of the armed forces, leaving excluded only those ex-commanders accused by Alfonsín and those who committed ‘abhorrent crimes.’”<sup>125</sup>

In 1985, the *juntas* were sent to trial and five former dictators were sentenced to prison. Although most members of the armed forces were initially accepting of plans to punish higher level military officers, resentment bubbled in the coming years. Military officers resigned in protest of the forced retirement of senior officers.<sup>126</sup> Alfonsín faced pressure to reverse low-level civilian court decisions and rumors of rebellion circulated between different factions of the armed forces.<sup>127</sup> As early as October of 1985, he privately committed to ending human rights trials against the military pending his reelection.<sup>128</sup> The administration bowed to demands from the military first in the Full Stop Law in December of 1986 and then in the Due Obedience Law in June of 1987, effectively thwarting any legal recourse for the Madres and their disappeared.

When the Alfonsín administration proved unwilling to punish former repressors, that motherist anger—their impetus to action, their collective identity—was revived and they were moved to act again. To the Madres, Alfonsín’s unwillingness to stand up to the military and pursue justice for their children was a continuation of the crime of forced disappearance.

Alfonsín was more than complicit; he held just as much responsibility as the military.

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> 19850316B, “[Ongoing Tensions Between the Government and the Armed Forces],” retrieved from the NSA William & Mary Internship Data Set, accessed 12 May 2018.

<sup>127</sup> 19851031C, “Belief in the Argentine Air Force that ‘Sectors’ of the Army are Involved in Plans against the Government,” retrieved from the NSA William & Mary Internship Data Set, accessed 12 May 2018; 19860918, “Argentina: Confrontation with the Military,” retrieved from the NSA William & Mary Internship Data Set, accessed 12 May 2018.

<sup>128</sup> NSA 19851031B, “Remarks of President Alfonsín to the Senior Officers of the Argentine Armed Forces Concerning the Domestic Situation and the Situation of the Armed Forces,” retrieved from the NSA William & Mary Internship Data Set, accessed 12 May 2018.

Months before he finalized the Full Stop and Due Obedience Laws, the Madres' rhetoric already framed his administration as repressive and in line with the dictatorship, indicating their anger and commitment to staunch opposition: "...the repressive apparatus brazenly reissues its old methods, uniformed or plainclothes, committing abuses and violations in the face of the people's powerlessness; the Falcons without tags patrol again, lurking around popular protests."<sup>129</sup> Hebe would later remark, "Alfonsín killed democracy."<sup>130</sup>

Here it important to recall Marilyn Frye's definition of anger: a sense of being "wronged," which requires not only a "claim to domain" but also an adversarial second party, a source of blame for that wrong. The Madres' rhetorical equivalence between Alfonsín and the dictatorship indicated that they placed not only remedial but even causal blame for the violation of their domain on the president. Not only had he allowed the original holders of blame to go free, but by effectively denying relief to the Madres' anger over the domain of their children, he suggested that the grievance was irrelevant and not in need of relief in the form of justice. This questioning of the Madres' maternal domain far from disrupted the Madres' emotional claims; on the contrary, it confirmed their adversarial stance against Alfonsín and only added fuel to the fire of their righteous motherist anger.

Though the Madres never established as heated a feud with Alfonsín as they would with Menem, their anger at his policies is evident from an assessment of the post-dictatorship years by Hebe: "What the governments of Menem and Alfonsín left us was helplessness before the murderous, impunity for perpetrators of genocide and a disgrace of justice. They left us a country

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<sup>129</sup> "Madres denuncian falta de garantías," *Clarín*, 2 April 1986.

<sup>130</sup> CPM – FONDO DIPPBA División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa DS, Carpeta Varios, Legajo 37415, 4-5.

that spends fortunes on weapons instead of schools and hospitals. A place where repression is more economic than social justice.”<sup>131</sup>

The Madres, armed with revived emotion and a new adversary, would not accept irrelevance but rather would defend their expanding domain by making claims, framing them in new ways, and seeking new audiences until they achieved resonance. They would repurpose their motherist anger, reshaping and redirecting it for the democratic context.

#### Affect Shift: Political-Economic Panic

In addition to the ominous frustration in the military, the Alfonsín administration had inherited an abysmal economic situation and nearly \$43 billion in national debt. In the first year of his presidency, Alfonsín revealed his frustration and nodded to the inevitable in a biting speech to the 39<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the UN. He argued “that ‘the issue of foreign debt appears today to be intimately linked to the political and social destiny of our countries. And to have this effect,’ he said, ‘as it happens, in our region as a whole, puts in play the global stability of Latin America.”<sup>132</sup> He further argued that the debt issue created a “field of harassment” for global superpowers which produced “the aggravation of local conflict” and “instability, injustice and poverty.”<sup>133</sup>

This fearful rhetoric shows Alfonsín was aware of the past effects of economic crises, in particular of an ostensibly imperialist origin, and the



<sup>131</sup> CPM – FONDO DIPPBA División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa DS, Carpeta Varios, Legajo 35766, 4.

<sup>132</sup> “Alfonsín: la deuda amenaza la estabilidad de las democracias,” *Clarín*, 25 September 1984.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

likelihood of a political-economic crisis. Further, his nervousness was perceptible; a political cartoon from leading newspaper *La Nación* shows a sweating Alfonsín perched on the formidable letters FMI (*Fundo Monetario Internacional*; the IMF).<sup>134</sup>

In fact, the country had faced simultaneous financial and political crises before the harried re-installation of Perón in 1973, and before the military coup of 1976. The discontented military combined with a grave economic situation and potential financial crisis made democracy precarious at best. The result, just as had occurred in the radicalizing period of the 1970s, was a sense of political-economic panic that would smolder within the populace, flare up in increasingly radical rhetoric of civil society, and fully emerge as the *carapintadas* crisis stirred fears of another dictatorship and economic crisis unfolded in the 1990s.

That sense of panic resulted in an affect shift among Argentina's civil society. Once democracy was restored, though precarious, the Madres' leftist allies began to actualize the affect of political-economic panic via increasingly angry and radical rhetoric and tactics. Just as the affect of a lost child created the emotion of motherist anger that drove the Madres to act, the affect of an impending crisis created—or rather, reignited—the emotion of popular anger that drove many human rights and leftist groups to act.

Deborah Gould's example of changing emotional habitus and the proliferation of anger in the AIDS activist movement is reflective of what happened in Argentina. Just as the severity of the AIDS crisis heightened the emotional stakes of insurgency, and the outrage over the *Hardwick* decision sparked a new path of activism, the affective and emotional experience of political-economic instability in Argentina during these years eventually manifested in popular anger. The “bodily intensities” and political feelings of political-economic panic manifested in

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<sup>134</sup> “FMI,” in *La Nación*, 27 September 1984.

many ways: the existential dread of yet another military dictatorship; the fear of looting, violent riots and police repression in the event of a crisis; the agitation of working-class masses facing hunger and unemployment; and the daily tragedy and emotional dissonance of remembering human rights violations of the dictatorship but seeing little to no justice.<sup>135</sup>

As Argentine society processed this affect and emotion, it also faced transformative events and protest cycles that reordered the configuration of allies and adversaries in civil society, and provided new grounds for individuals to claim and describe perceived injustices. This shifting sense of economic habitus infected all of society, allowing opportunities for redefinition and re-awakening of activism not only for the Madres, but also for new sectors of claim-makers as well as traditional labor and radical militants.

The labor union collective the CGT, officially reunited since 1983 but still struggling with disunion between factions, called hundreds of strikes in the 1980s as real wages dropped and hyperinflation soared. In a document titled “It’s bad to live in democracy with a dictatorship complex” from February of 1986, the CGT begin, “we are not going to stop criticizing in democracy... because democracy does not sanctify poverty nor dependence.” They argue:

...what Argentines want today is a different country, and we are convinced that we will not advance to it with old ways like the multiplication of debt, the liquidation of our country to the hands of transnational capitalism, the subordination of provincial economies to centralism, the fatal acceptance of an unnecessary and counterproductive dependence. A different country from the colony the dictatorship left us, that will only be able to come through different procedures from those the dictators used.<sup>136</sup>

This allusion illustrates not only their dissatisfaction with the Alfonsín regime, but also the overbearing and fearful presence of the memory of dictatorship in economic frames of protest

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<sup>135</sup> Gould, *Moving Politics*, 20.

<sup>136</sup> “Coincidieron en sus críticas al Gobierno la C.G.T. y la U.C.D.,” *Clarín*, 11 February 1986.

as well. The affect of panic in society was actualized in fear of repeating the past and rhetoric that echoed the angry leftist manifestos of previous radicals.

Their direct anger at the government became clear later that year. The Alfonsín administration, they argue, “has not responded to the expectations of the workers, business leaders and other sectors of national life on the topic of solutions to the problems that afflict our country, such as... the need for an economic recovery that considers our immediate social needs with justice.”<sup>137</sup> They also held a meeting with youth leaders from not only the more mainstream Peronist and Democratic Christian parties, but also the Workers’ Party and the Popular Leftist Front.

*The Menem Years: Panic Affect Actualized in Popular Anger*

By the time Menem was elected president, the sense of political-economic panic already held a firm grip on Argentine civil society. Alfonsín’s failed *Plan Austral* left the country in a recession with extreme hyperinflation. Though Menem was from the Peronist party, in the first weeks of his presidency he made clear his intention to embrace neoliberal Washington Consensus standards for austerity, privatization and free trade in an attempt to lower the national debt. The administration attempted to bill the economic reforms as a “synthesis” of Peronism and Liberalism, but leftist Peronists and other leftist allies of the Madres were appalled by Menem’s disregard for their anti-imperialist principles.<sup>138</sup>

Just one month into Menem’s presidency, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo held a gathering in the Plaza de Mayo with the slogan “Against Amnesty and Hunger.”<sup>139</sup> Nobel Peace Prize

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> “Menem hizo un síntesis de peronismo y liberalismo,” *Clarín*, 17 August 1989.

<sup>139</sup> “Con las Madres en la Plaza,” *Página 12*, 11 August 1989.

recipient and influential human rights activist Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, a survivor of detainment during the dictatorship, delivered a telling rebuke:

Human rights are not separated from the theme of hunger. Here an economic terrorism was produced, as well as the constant plunder of our resources, because you don't need to be an economist to know that a country that bases itself on speculation and not production is destined to fail... On this I want to be clear: the social crisis is already here. It is hunger, unemployment, and marginality. There already is a social crisis, what happened is it's already been contained; someday, it will burst to the surface... This is a call to the responsibility and conscience of all the Argentine people, to organize when faced when this grave situation, as well as a call to the attention of the government, to the legislators.<sup>140</sup>

Hebe de Bonafini, too, alluded to the economic dimensions of the fight: "We must fight against hunger, which kills more than bullets."<sup>141</sup> This sense of indignation held by even activists demonstrates the extension of domain of anger that had been largely rooted in critiques and memories of the dictatorship. Esquivel also refers to the inevitability of social crisis—a crisis he believes is already present, just hiding under the surface—connecting the more generalized affect of political-economic panic and to an expectation that it would become expressed as popular anger. In fact, he calls on the Argentine people to act, to actualize their panic by organizing and directing their anger.

Both Esquivel and Bonafini refer to the theme of *hunger*. What other experience or condition better encapsulates the sensory experience and bodily intensity of panic, crisis and poverty than hunger? By calling on this familiar bodily experience, the orators humanize panic, make it cognitively accessible, and invite the audience to recognize and actualize the affect. From these remarks, it is clear that the Madres and their allies were committed to opposing

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

Menem and embracing the radical emotions rooted in political-economic panic; this set the stage for a rich decade of contention.

Menem believed that the most important goal for Argentina to achieve was “definitive pacification of the country.”<sup>142</sup> He argued that “‘we do not have to distinguish between military and civilians in cultivating our sense of patriotism,’ because ‘one and the other, whatever their condition, age, culture and fortune, must find themselves emphatically united in the sacrosanct love for our Fatherland.’”<sup>143</sup> In the same statement, he alluded to “‘solutions of pardons or other means’ in relation to the so-called military issue” to show his commitment to reconciliation.<sup>144</sup>

Menem and his Minister of the Interior Eduardo Bauzá were eager to commit to a “military solution,” lest they face the continued rocky relations fared by Alfonsín. Just a month after his inauguration, Bauzá promised the press a solution “in 15 days,” noting that “we must avoid anything that may instigate confrontation.”<sup>145</sup> It is clear that Menem’s administration was immediately and gravely concerned with establishing a positive rapport with the military: an indication of the precarious nature of civilian-military relations and Argentine social affect generally.

By moving to pardon so quickly in his presidency, without even addressing the Madres’ longstanding anger and claim to justice for their children, Menem signaled that he was more concerned with avoiding military confrontation than militant confrontation with the Madres and their leftist allies. This move shows that Menem prioritized taking measures to address military anger and re-establish the military’s dominion as the country’s “ultimate moral reserve,” above

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<sup>142</sup> “Afirman que habrá indulto o amnistía,” *Clarín*, 21 August 1989.

<sup>143</sup> “El Presidente formula otro llamado a la reconciliación,” *Clarín*, 18 August 1989.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> “Bauzá: ‘Solución military en 15 días,’” *Clarín*, 19 August 1989.



the law and outside the jurisdiction of national courts.<sup>146</sup> The other side of this prioritization was his dismissal of the Madres' own claim to justice for their children. Now faced with this denial for a second time, the Madres revamped their criticism.

In October of that year, Menem issued a sweeping set of pardons that allowed former military repressors, including those convicted, to go free. The Madres and their allies, of course, were already poised to critique the government after Alfonsín's impunity measures. Hebe de Bonafini called Menem a hypocrite and decried his "prostituting to the military."<sup>147</sup> The less confrontational Madres-Línea Fundadora and Abuelas co-signed a statement along with other human rights organizations that sharply criticized Alfonsín and Menem's "arbitrary" impunity laws and called for the "closing of the open wounds in the social body of our homeland."<sup>148</sup> Though perhaps unsurprising, this betrayal reignited yet again the motherist anger rooted in the domain of their children and established the Menem administration as a definitive adversary. Further, by issuing the pardons so early on in his presidency, Menem forfeited the opportunity to appeal to the Madres' well-established influence over civil society and invited a well-rounded rebuke from not only the Madres but their allies as well.

The political-economic panic affect would continue to permeate Argentine society and would appear actualized as popular anger in the mid-1990s and early 2000s. Around 1995, the *piquetero* movement erupted as unemployed and underemployed members of the working class—*desocupados*—began to mobilize for work and against exploitation. These localized groups closed major roadways and held marches in public displays of popular anger that made

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<sup>146</sup> Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture*, Rev. & updated, with a new epilogue (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 144.

<sup>147</sup> "Nueva Marcha de la Resistencia de las Madres de Plaza de Mayo," *Página 12*, 6 December 1989; "Menem cuestionó la marcha de las Madres porque ensucian la Plaza," *Página 12*, 7 December 1990.

<sup>148</sup> "Oposición al indulto a militares de parte de varias organizaciones," *Clarín*, 19 August 1989.

use of and amplified political-economic panic. As the Madres operated in an increasingly more panicked environment of popular anger, their own emotional expression would change as well.

### Creating Emotion and Meaning in Popular-Motherist Anger

Today we want the people to leave with the idea to fight against hunger and amnesty. For our part, we will keep coming every Thursday to stake our claims, each time closer and closer to the needs of the people.<sup>149</sup>

*Hebe de Bonafini*, 8 August 1989.

When political-economic instability created an affect shift in Argentine society, the Madres incorporated the popular anger entrenched in their environment into their own emotional habitus. They communicated popular anger in a distinctly motherist way, referring to an intergenerational maternal emotional domain as their source of righteousness. Furthermore, rather than relying on or abusing anger, the Madres embraced a range of maternal and activist emotions that endowed their movement with not only sources of anger, but also pride, hope, tirelessness, and love. The result was a hybridized sense of popular motherist emotion that combined popular anger with motherist emotion to communicate their new claims and give meaning to their hybridized popular motherist activist frame.

As I have already shown, the 1988 “Letter to Our Children” is one of the first examples of the use of the hybrid popular motherist frame since it presents their activism as both motivated by their children and rooted in the historical anti-globalist protest frame against exploitation. But beyond introducing these implications for their tactical framing, the letter also defines two essential qualities—an adversary and a domain—of the evolving sense of motherist anger that drove the Madres to develop innovative tactics for organizing. It is worth re-introducing an excerpt of the letter to illustrate these components of emotion.

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<sup>149</sup> “Con las Madres en la plaza,” *Página 12*, 8 November 1989.

When many believed that nothing would stop the march of genocide, we went out, to the streets and the world, to fight for your lives. We came to the Plaza...And little by little we began to fight for the same things for which you fought. And as if we were following a parallel destiny, we had to confront, one and a thousand times, the same hated enemy... Today we can say that your fight continues and grows with each new comrade who comes to the Plaza... The fight for freedom is present in each youth, each worker, each militant who learns from you that this is the only path to a world where men do not oppress other men, where there is no exploitation, where there is justice. We will, as always, continue fighting for life, against death... Unto the final factory, beloved children!<sup>150</sup>

Although they faced a new political structure under democracy, they claimed “the same hated enemy” as their disappeared children, in effect using their motherist domain to claim a legitimate continuity of anger at the adversary of general exploitation. The Madres’ anger extended to not only the dictators and the impunity of democratic regimes, but at any generic ruling authority that condoned oppression and exploitation. This sense of a flexible adversary would be key to their ability to mobilize their popular motherist anger.

Their framing the struggle as “fighting for life” also has implications for the domain of the Madres’ popular motherist anger. Although they had always been concerned with life, the Madres’ original impetus to action was the preservation of the individual lives of their children, the *desaparecidos*. Now, though, they claimed a far broader impetus to action: “life” generally, or the right (for even those acting on popular anger) to live. The Madres’ sense of anger would remain rooted in these two principles even as it evolved, proliferated and veered further left.

The Madres often claim that “our children begot us.”<sup>151</sup> Such a claim invites skepticism, since not all *desaparecidos* were in fact activists, nor necessarily leftists united for the same

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<sup>150</sup> CPM – FONDO DIPPBA División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa DE, Factor Social, Carpeta Entidades Varias, Legajo 617, 66.

<sup>151</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 178.

agenda the Madres later adopted. I argue we can make sense of this claim by reframing the Madres' and their children's political identities in terms of righteous anger.

Regardless of their personal political identification, the *desaparecidos* of Argentina's last dictatorship were killed by the military state in a frenzied attack against leftist guerrillas at first and then militant civilians. These individuals expressed popular anger and made claims against the state in a contentious (sometimes, violent) way. The disappearance of these individuals was not merely an act to quell violence; a 1988 government report stated fewer than 500 died at the hands of guerrilla organizations, compared to estimates as high as 30,000 at the hands of the military.<sup>152</sup> Rather, the disappearances were acts by the military to repress and contain contention, denying the *desaparecidos*' claims of popular anger.

In extinguishing that anger, eliminating the very life force that produced and communicated it, the military denied the claim to domain of popular anger: a popularly held domain of the right to free speech and political protest. This denial of popular anger, the elimination of life and infringement on the right to organize and protest, was the incitement of the Madres' own motherist anger and activism. Thus, in an emotional sense, the Madres' children indeed begot them; the attempted suppression of their popular anger, rather than successfully ridding society of activism, sparked the new wave of motherist anger and activism. Further, as the Madres incorporated popular anger into their own emotional habitus, they lay claim to the same domain their children had: that of a right to political protest. The Madres embraced their children's emotional domain as their own and reincorporated it with the ethic of care and maternal morality stemming from their own collective identity.

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<sup>152</sup> {Citation}

An Asociación Madres flier from 1992 illustrates this concept of intergenerational activism and introduces an expansion of the Madres' domain to the "new children" of Argentina: "... 15 years ago Argentina experienced a miracle. Children gave birth to their mothers, the mothers multiplied and from their souls were birthed new children. And this circle will not stop turning until we arrive at the time of justice, equality, tenderness and beauty for all."<sup>153</sup> Here the Madres express another maternal emotion: joy. The origin of this joy appears to arise from two things: the "miracle" of the creation of life, the construction of an intergenerational connection, which is the backbone the Madres' emotional domain of their children; and the continuous, emotional, intergenerational process of seeking justice. This shows that the Madres' source of emotion arises not only from their children but from a popular domain of protest and speech as well.

The implications of this intergenerational framing for the Madres' emotion are two-fold. The Madres received their purpose for activism—not only their anger, but their identity—from their children, and after gaining this new identity "birthed new children" for which to care. The "new children" they construct are individuals born from the Madres' anger and activism, defined by their identity as children of resistance. Here the Madres claim their motherhood of militant youth and popular protesters. Second, since their identity is defined by motherist activism, the practice and principle of militancy for the life of one's child (or the right to life generally), it follows that the lives of their "new children" is in their motherist domain.

This claim to motherhood shows that the Madres' sense of anger arose from their broad concern for children of resistance, and that they felt driven to defend those mobilizing for change—inevitably, those engaging in popular protest to combat exploitation in society. As the

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<sup>153</sup> CPM – FONDO DIPPBA División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa DE, Factor Social, Carpeta Entidades Varias, Legajo 541, 4.

political-economic panic of the 1990s wore on, a protest cycle was born in the *piqueteros*, working poor and the unemployed who were driven to localized acts of resistance like highway closures to protest privatizations, among other neoliberal economic policies they felt exploited the working class. This protest cycle had a profound effect on the Madres, whose domain of anger grew to include the lives and wellbeing of these “children” of resistance—the anti-neoliberal generation—as central motivating factors.

Even before the *piqueteros*, in the heightened panic of Menem’s first years, the Madres were committed to defending protest and the voices of their “new children.” In 1990, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo’s annual *Marcha de Resistencia* coincided with President George Bush’s visit to Argentina. They used the slogan “rebelliousness to fight, courage to carry on” in reference to the pardons then concluded their 24-hour *ronda* (“circle” around the Plaza de Mayo) with a massive demonstration featuring a broad coalition of the Argentine left demanding “‘the Yankees’ get out of ‘Panama, the Falkland Islands and Iraq.’”<sup>154</sup> In an interview about the march, Bonafini cited the pardons, poverty and imperialism all as grievances. She further conveyed the emotions of happiness, devotion and exhaustion to voice her commitment to popular protest:

...we must encourage participation and please, with excitement, with happiness for the act. The youth do not need to leave the country, we must convince them to stay and throw out those that do not serve us all. We, the Madres, try within our means to unite the people that want to work seriously, doing strong things from the base. The people are tired of being asked for their vote, they want to be consulted, listened to and respected.<sup>155</sup>

Their desire to create happiness with the youth and unite “the people,” their children of resistance, shows how the Madres’ emotion was sourced from their intergenerational connections. Further, Hebe expresses a concern for the tiredness of popular protesters, a maternal

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<sup>154</sup> “La izquierda sacó a pasear su bronco por Plaza de Mayo,” *Página 12*, 6 December 1990.

<sup>155</sup> “Hebe de Bonafini: ‘Seremos muchos contra el indulto,’” *Página 12*, 5 December 1990.

claim to those individuals' wellbeing as well as acknowledgment of the exhausting emotional labor of activism.

Most importantly, she expresses the emotion of devotion on behalf of the Madres to the “people,” the “youth,” their children of resistance. Here the Madres celebrate the practice of popular protest, and commit to defending and promoting not only the right to express popular anger but a sense of “happiness,” a sense of pride for the act. Their desire to “encourage participation” and “unite” a base of resistance can still be traced back to their maternal domain, that claim to justice for the lives of their children. Menem’s pardons denied the Madres’ original maternal claim to justice for their children. But by using maternal emotion to defend the right to popular protest of a new generation of activists, the Madres established an intergenerational domain of motherist activism with a goal of protection against the future violation of the right to popular protest.

As Menem pursued neoliberal economic plans, privatizing state businesses and opening up trade and investment, unemployment surpassed 10% in 1993 and reached 18% by 1995.<sup>156</sup> Civil society saw the start of the *piquetero* protest cycle as the still-fragile economy opened up to global capitalism and the working poor were driven deeper into poverty and popular anger. This anger would actualize in the form of violent riots in Santiago del Estero, Jujuy and San Juan starting in 1993.<sup>157</sup> An Asociación Madres flier in 1992 describes this sense of popular anger and shows that they revered and were motivated by its power and longevity:

...the rebellion of the Latin American peoples is their most sacred heritage.  
Accumulating in more than 500 years of struggle. For this we trust in the subterranean

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<sup>156</sup> “Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) (modeled ILO estimate),” International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database. Data retrieved in March 2017.

<sup>157</sup> Ricardo Farías, “El Santiagueñazo: la rebellion emblemática de la década del 90,” *La Izquierda Diario*, 16 December 2017.

strength that one day will burst forth like a volcano that will never stop, confirming the shared dream of those who are no longer with us and those who continue on this beautiful path for a Latin America free of internal or external domination.<sup>158</sup>

The flier continues, "... you do not need to be a sociologist to recognize that the bourgeoisie practices a dictatorship over society... This is democracy for a few. For us, democracy is for the great majority of the population, for those who produce, for the working class."<sup>159</sup> This claim again illustrates the Madres' claim to the domain of the working class. Not only does this illustrate the motherist anti-globalist frame they built, but it also shows that their activism was motivated by a desire to protect and promote the working class—that sector of society most engaged in popular protest against exploitation.

Hebe in particular would continue to defend the interests of the working class by advocating socialist, anti-imperialist politics with a strong sense of popular motherist anger as well as pleasure for the act of protest:

[Menem's government] kills with hunger and those who don't pay anything are dead. People die diseases of poverty, they kill themselves because they have nothing to eat; these are deaths that the government of Menem must take credit for... democracy doesn't exist when there is no justice, it exists when we all have work, we all eat, when there is respect... I found the pleasure of the struggle, the pleasure of revolution, every day I tell the youth that the greatest pleasure in life is to fight for another, and that is what must be learned.<sup>160</sup>

Their socialist claims show that the Madres began to fight not just for life and the right to popular anger, but for *living* and *wellbeing* of the working poor. The motherist anger expressed here was no longer a retroactive sense of indignation at the repression of protest and life, but a

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<sup>158</sup> CPM – FONDO DIPPBA División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa DS, Carpeta Varios, Legajo 36728, 60.

<sup>159</sup> CPM – FONDO DIPPBA División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa DE, Factor Social, Carpeta Entidades Varias, Legajo 541, 2.

<sup>160</sup> CPM – FONDO DIPPBA División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa DS, Carpeta Varios, Legajo 37415, 3-6.



comprehensive sense of injustice felt on behalf of all the children of resistance, the most marginalized of society. Their sense of popular motherist anger—both its adversary and its domain—had originated in the familial, anti-authoritarian motherism of the 1970s but now evolved to drive an all-encompassing anti-globalist motherist agenda that fought for the life and wellbeing of all of Argentina’s children. Further, her desire to communicate and inspire the pleasure of revolution shows her dedication to the right to popular anger and protest, the centrality of the popular domain to the Madres’ evolved sense of anger. Further, it shows that the intergenerational process of constructing and communicating emotion—instilling the *pleasure* of revolution in one’s progeny—is critical to the Madres’ own emotional survival.

### Conclusion

In December 1996, a Madre at their annual *Marcha* told an interviewer, “I feel like a mother to everyone.”<sup>161</sup> In a sense, the Madres’ motherism changed very little over the course of time; at first, they organized under the dictatorship for the wellbeing of their children, and now, they organized under democracy for the wellbeing of the dependent and disadvantaged. The expansion of their motherist domain to encompass all the working poor and the resonance of their political-economic critiques was only possible through the Madres’ agency in defining their own emotional habitus.

The political-economic panic of the 1980s and 1990s established an affect shift that animated and radicalized civil society with fears of an authoritarian relapse, resulting in revitalized expressions of popular anger by the left and working poor. The Madres, inspired by contemporaneous grassroots protest cycles, embraced this popular anger, defended it, and incorporated it into their own maternal emotional domain.

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<sup>161</sup> “Otro mástil en Plaza de Mayo,” *Página 12*, 6 December 1996.

Hebe once remarked, “The only way to kill our children is for the people to forget them.”<sup>162</sup> By adopting their children’s popular claims—defending the right to speech and popular protest, or the expression of anger at the state—the Madres claimed the act of resistance within their maternal domain. This enabled them to apply their maternal moral authority to radical leftist critiques that resonated with the panicked political feeling of broader society. Further, the Madres’ reconstruction of motherist anger placed future generations of activists and the very act of resistance within their maternal domain.

The result was an intergenerational process of emotion construction and communication in which the Madres’ activism encompassed not only their own emotional domain but that of their children’s and their metaphorical new children; their sense of injustice and drive to carry on arose from not only their own anger, but anger on behalf of all those working-class individuals mobilizing their sense of popular fear against exploitation.

If Argentina had not experienced such political-economic tumult to spark popular anger in the process of democratization, would the Madres still have attempted to fuse their motherist activism with the working-class anti-globalist framing of the past? Or would they have remained in their traditional motherist roles, outside the realm of leftist politics? What was the deciding factor that placed the Madres in the radical position of popular anger?

I argue that an individual—one already described, but whose story merits further discussion—played a decisive role in bringing the working-class message to the Madres. The Asociación Madres President Hebe de Bonafini, a child of the working-class Peronist neighborhoods of industrial La Plata, combined her leftist childhood experience with an

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<sup>162</sup> “La Resistencia,” *Página 12*, 11 December 1992.

uncompromising, confrontational style of rhetoric and direct action to place the Madres in a radical, rebellious position from early on in their activism.

### **Chapter Three: A Radical Leader's Reach**

In order for a social movement to remain relevant in the political sphere, its identity and claims must evolve along with changing times, trends and politics. Though the Madres' original organizing claim—appearance with life of their children—was never met, the women remained relevant in Argentine politics for four decades because of their connections to radical segments of civil society and their continuous, radical reiterations of political claims and critiques. The survivability of their movement, given the literal disappearance of their original claim, can be understood by their ability to hybridize resonant master frames and expand their emotional maternal domain; but what decisive force compelled them to this radical course, and kept the Madres relevant in society?

I will argue that individual leaders' experiences and dispositions can have a decisive impact on the evolution of a movement by analyzing the case of the Asociación Madres President Hebe de Bonafini. Hebe's leadership style is an amalgamation of her upbringing in the working-class Peronist neighborhoods of industrial La Plata, dedication to revolutionary motherhood, a penchant for controversy and an unapologetically confrontational personality. Her profound influence not only caused a schism between the radical and more moderate Madres factions, but also changed the public perception and collective identity of the Madres by placing the organization at the forefront of contentious politics.

The Madres' notoriety has resulted in controversy, especially in their later years, largely as a result of the intelligent, outspoken and fearless Hebe. Her refusal to engage in institutional reparations caused a schism in 1986, when a group of Madres left the Asociación to establish the Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora ("Founding Line," although both groups are made up of original founders of the organization) to work more closely with the government.

Hebe's feuds with heads of state and biting hatred of the U.S.'s imperialist reach have consistently placed her and her organization in a militant position, testing the limits of their maternal domain and radicalizing their identity. Throughout the years, Hebe's headline-grabbing, unforgiving anti-imperialist proclamations would imbue the Madres' public image with controversy. In 2007 the Madres co-hosted an "anti-imperialist rally" in response to President George W. Bush's tour of Latin America and invited President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela to make an incendiary speech. The New York Times had the following to say regarding the Madres:

The stadium rally Mr. Chávez attended was sponsored by union groups with ties to the Peronist government in Argentina, and a faction of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, a human rights group led by Hebe de Bonafini. (She has expressed satisfaction at the Sept. 11 attacks, saying that Americans deserved a taste of their own medicine, and has also recently made anti-Semitic remarks.)<sup>163</sup>

The focus on Hebe shows that even though a faction of the Madres broke off to pursue institutionalized means of reparations, the Madres' collective public image is reflective of an individual leader's inflammatory attitude and escalation of contention. Some of the Madres come from middle- or upper-class backgrounds (particularly those in Línea Fundadora), and not all of the Madres agree with Hebe's uncompromising style; nevertheless, her energy and enduring influence kept the Madres at the forefront of political contention in Argentina.

Beyond a few theories that describe the role of "great leaders" in mobilizing movements, the social movements literature has traditionally ignored the influence of individual leaders in favor on structural determinants of social movement mobilization, such as resource access and

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<sup>163</sup> Jim Rutenberg and Larry Rohter, "Bush and Chávez Spar at Distance over Latin Visit," *The New York Times*, 10 March 2007.

political structures.<sup>164</sup> But the effectiveness of an individual as a “mobilizer” and “articulator” is a function of that individual’s personal experience and disposition, as well as their relation to not only other members of the movement but broader society as well.<sup>165</sup> Although I maintain a consideration of individual disposition by discussing Hebe’s inflammatory rhetorical style, my work veers from the literature on leadership in social movements by de-emphasizing importance of an individual’s charisma to look closer at how an individual’s social and cultural connections can influence their style of leadership. I will show how Hebe’s upbringing in the working-class neighborhoods of La Plata and proximity to economic and leftist claims made a decisive impact on the Madres’ evolution.

In this section, I will show how the configuration of actors evolved such that the Madres were poised in the years following the dictatorship to not only continue their militancy but to construct a more radical sense of motherist activism than before. This survival and evolution occurred not only thanks to initial posturing of the Madres as oppositional elements in dictatorship society but also due to the influence of the Asociación president Hebe de Bonafini, whose controversial and fearless attitude served as the catalyst of the emotional and tactical transformation of the Madres’ motherist activism.

### The Making of a Revolutionary

When they engage in political acts, the Mothers are a flock of geese rolling into a headwind with a seamless movement. The bird leading the angle and breaking the impact of the air is Hebe.<sup>166</sup>

Hebe was known worldwide for her work with the Madres even before the end of the dictatorship and remains a treasured source of inspiration for Argentina’s left today. She is from

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<sup>164</sup> Morris and Staggenborg, “Leadership,” 171; cf. Jay Conger, *Charismatic Leadership* (John Wiley & Sons, 1988).

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>166</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 100.

La Plata, a city on the edge of the Greater Buenos Aires industrial corridor in which Peronism was born.<sup>167</sup> She grew up on an unpaved street outside of a factory where her father worked and had to learn to hunt, cook, and weave to help her family make ends meet; as Margeurite Bouvard recounts, “Hebe grew up with the love of a large extended family on one hand, and the reality of economic hardship on the other.”<sup>168</sup> Despite dreams of education, she only attended primary school, and married at 21. In addition to informal work of raising children, sewing and knitting, Hebe helped her husband in his mechanics workshop. Though she was not an activist on her own, she was proxy to the community-level activism of her brothers, father and sons, as well as the rich tradition of labor and student activism in La Plata.

As Aldon Morris and Suzanne Staggenborg note in their analysis of leadership within social movements, “leaders who emerge from poor and working-class communities are likely to share the interests of their class and to enjoy advantages in mobilizing their social bases that outsiders lack.”<sup>169</sup> Hebe was not educated and had “no previous political experience” before founding the Madres in 1977 and held a profound class consciousness and tendency toward communalism from early on.<sup>170</sup> Of one of her first meetings with disappeared founding Madre Azucena Villaflor de Devincenti, Hebe recalled that “we started to talk about our races, our people, our neighborhoods... we became friends because of this.”<sup>171</sup>

Further, despite her lack of education, Hebe’s childhood proximity to her father’s activism and her relationship with her children were sufficient to ground her with a grasp on the

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<sup>167</sup> Matthew Karush and Oscar Chamosa, “The New Cultural History of Peronism,” *Power and Identity in Mid-Twentieth-Century Argentina*. Durham, London, 2010, 162.

<sup>168</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 101.

<sup>169</sup> Morris and Staggenborg, “Leadership,” 175.

<sup>170</sup> Josephine Fisher, *Mothers of the Disappeared* (South End Press, 1989), 152.

<sup>171</sup> *Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo: Un punto de referencia para los revolucionarios de América Latina* :[entrevista (Hondarribia Spain: IRU, 1996), 9.

literature and figureheads of the Latin American left. Because of her exposure to arguments and protest for radical economic justice, she was unafraid of leftist economic critique:

I never read Marx, but I know many of his principles. I know that he was a very intelligent man and that he fought for the oppressed. My children spoke to me of him... I hate such injustice and marginalization. And I think that these are the same things for which my children fought, who were Marxist. So, I feel Marxist, I feel revolutionary.<sup>172</sup>

Thus Hebe's working-class experience manifested not only in her ability to make leftist allies and successfully frame resonant critiques but in the very act of making economic claims that would have been far outside the norm of motherhood if it weren't for a radical background and willingness to bridge the gap between leftism and motherism.

This working-class conscience was coupled with her embrace and redefinition of conservative Argentine gender roles, modeled after the pious Catholic "mother of sorrows" imagery, in which women were expected to remain homebound, submissive, and dedicated to their children: caring, but not political.<sup>173</sup> When the Madres' children disappeared, they defied the norm of apoliticism but acted on the cultural expectation of care for one's children, grief, and piety. Hebe particularly relied on her own role of caretaker and mother to bolster her moral authority and justify her claims to the radical leftist goals of her militant children.

Bouvard noted that although Hebe's ambitions of an education and career were discouraged within the family, she embraced a domestic role, pouring "her expansiveness, strength of character, and energy into rearing her children."<sup>174</sup> Though theoretically a private, apolitical role, this experience is exactly what led the Madres to their impassioned search for

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<sup>172</sup> "Los rostros de nuestros hijos nos están mirando," *Página 12*, 6 12 1995.

<sup>173</sup> Bejarano, "Las Super Madres," 408.

<sup>174</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 102.



their children: “The Mothers were the first to leave their homes and interrupt their daily routines in order to search for their children; the fathers had to go to work.”<sup>175</sup>

As Hebe and the Madres navigated the extremely politicized and heavily surveilled public sphere of the dictatorship, they maintained the imagery and moral authority of the motherist activist frame, sporting white *pañuelos* and insisting on the return of their children. Their effectiveness in creating emotion in resistance allowed them to form natural alliances with leftist civil society organizations, who took up the Madres’ cause alongside their leftist economic critiques. To Hebe, who had grown up in a family of Peronist labor militants and learned of Marxism from her children, this must have seemed a natural fit.<sup>176</sup>

After the dictatorship, the Madres faced a challenge in adapting to a new kind of political structure and evolving civil society. In their “Final Report” on the “anti-subversive struggle,” the spurned military *juntas* announced, “those who make up the lists of the *desaparecidos* and who are not found in exile or in hiding, in legal and administrative effect are considered dead.”<sup>177</sup> They further dismissed the *desaparecidos*’ fate by announcing that missing individuals died in police confrontations, committed suicide or were buried somewhere as “N.N.” (no name). It was clear that the Madres’ original claim to contest the status quo and the source of their moral authority as motherist activists, the return of their children, was not a realistic possibility.

If the Madres were to continue organizing as a social movement, they faced two questions in defining their new identity. First, for what should the Madres fight? And second, should they embrace the newly open political structure and push for institutional reform, or continue to operate as a militant social movement in opposition to the state? Ultimately, the

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>176</sup> “Los rostros de nuestros hijos nos están mirando,” *Página 12*, 6 12 1995.

<sup>177</sup> “Declaran muertos a los desaparecidos,” *Clarín*, 29 April 1983.

women would have different answers for this question; though all of those who stayed involved would generally maintain leftist alliances, Hebe's obstinate radicalism and refusal to consider institutionalization immediately following the dictatorship would drive the Madres apart and enable Hebe to drive her faction, the Asociación Madres, further left.

### The Split: Hebe's Revolutionary Path

After the fall of the dictatorship, Hebe quickly became skeptical when UCR candidate Raúl Alfonsín assumed the presidency. In June of 1984, Alfonsín made a comment that "there were alive disappeared people," referring to the unidentified stolen babies that had been stolen from disappeared mothers and sold into adoption. Demanding to know their location—or at least a clarification—Hebe and a small group of Madres requested and were granted an interview. When they arrived, Alfonsín was at a Carlos Gardel memorial at the Teatro Colón; Hebe later scoffed, "Of course, he goes to the Gardel memorial because he's dead and won't ask him for anything."<sup>178</sup> They set up camp and slept on the floor of the entryway to the Casa Rosada until Alfonsín met them.

Later that year, the rift between Hebe and Alfonsín—and the rift between the two Madres factions—grew more pronounced. The year prior, Alfonsín had appointed the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons to investigate human rights violations during the military dictatorship. On September 21, 1984, CONADEP delivered its final report titled *Nunca Más* to the Casa Rosada. Some 25,000 people convened on the Plaza de Mayo to voice their support for this first act of justice, including all the major political parties and an impressive party of human rights representatives from the APDH, Liga Argentina de DDHH, CELS, and the

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<sup>178</sup> Luis Iramain and Gerardo y Nielsen, "Entrevista a la presidenta de la Asociación de Madres de Plaza de Mayo," *Página Digital*, 12 February 2002.

Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo.<sup>179</sup> Notably missing from the festivities were the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, who under the leadership of Hebe had not supported the objectives of CONADEP.

As its name implied, the objective of the CONADEP was to identify missing people, *not* to identify agents of oppression in the military or police, or complicit civilians. Hebe and other more staunchly militant mothers marched under the banner of “justice and punishment for the guilty,” demanding the identities of military and police repressors be released to the public.<sup>180</sup> In the interest of cooling military agitation, the Alfonsín administration was reluctant to accept such a wide-reaching demand.

As the day of the report’s arrival to the Casa Rosada happened to be Thursday, the Madres convened with some 1,500 sympathizers for their 3:30 march brandishing a banner stating “*Buscados por asesinos*” or “Wanted for murder,” with “photographs of some 100 military officers suspected for excesses of repression.”<sup>181</sup> Just hours before thousands of spectators and the CONADEP report listing many of their children’s names arrived to the Casa Rosada, they marched out of the Plaza to the Congress. But later, when the CONADEP festivities began, some 20 Madres left and returned to the Plaza to join. Though the Madres hadn’t officially supported the CONADEP report under Hebe’s leadership, even before the schism a faction of more moderate followers was interested in institutional cooperation. Nevertheless, Hebe’s uncompromising style left the Madres adverse to Alfonsín and demonstrated a capacity for radical opposition.

Another conflict was the issue of exhumations, which began in 1985 with great fanfare as foreign forensic scientists arrived in Argentina to investigate mass graves and identify corpses.

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<sup>179</sup> “Masiva concentración en la Plaza de Mayo,” *Clarín*, 21 September 1984.

<sup>180</sup> “Ronda de las Madres,” *Clarín*, 21 September 1984.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

For Hebe and her more radical adherents, who repeatedly contested impunity by demanding to know the identity of the perpetrators, this was a futile and insulting pursuit. At the first official unearthing in Mar del Plata, Hebe threatened a judge: “If you touch one of those corpses, I am going to throw you in the grave head first.”<sup>182</sup> The unearthing did not go through. This outcome is clear evidence of Hebe’s powerful skill as an individual leading a movement. Her sense of anger was rooted in motherism—domain over one’s child—but her expression of that claim reflected her inflammatory and radical disposition.

In the context of the exhumations and stalled trials of military officials, Hebe continued to staunchly oppose Alfonsín. She called him out for election meddling, accused him of “complacency... with the most dangerous criminals,” and roundly denounced “the repressive apparatus shamelessly repurposing its old methods, uniformed and civil, carrying out outrages and violations before the powerlessness of the people.”<sup>183</sup>

Hebe’s fearless form of direct action and indignant attitude towards the democratic government frustrated a faction of Madres who would rather work within political institutions to achieve tangible forms of justice than alienate the government. In early 1986, following a particularly contentious election for President of the Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, some dozen Madres officially left and established the Madres de Plaza de Mayo—Línea Fundadora. These women were generally better educated and upper or middle class, a distinction which, as Bouvard described, added “an element of bitterness to the departure since the majority of Mothers were from the working class.”<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 149.

<sup>183</sup> “Madres denuncian falta de garantías,” *Clarín*, 4 February 1986.

<sup>184</sup> Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood*, 163.

One major conflict between the Asociación Madres and Línea Fundadora (LF) illustrates well the central ideological disagreement between the groups: the question of memorials. LF Madre Reneé Epelbaum supported and helped create memorials for the *desaparecidos*, and pointed to the resurgence of Nazism in Germany as proof of their necessity. Hebe, on the other hand, once refused to attend an event in which her hometown's University of La Plata named classrooms for her daughter-in-law and other *desaparecidos*: instead of memorials, Hebe stated, "I want them to say, 'This classroom commits itself to what María Elena was doing, to fight for the country the way María Elena did.'"<sup>185</sup>

For these two groups of women, the purpose of the Madres diverged. The generally wealthier and better educated LF Madres advanced more benign means of remembrance, justice and compromise—memorials for the disappeared, exhumations and burial of the dead, and collaboration with the democratic government—that made little attempt to challenge the status quo. Hebe, on the other hand, embraced a militant disposition, drawing on her childhood in the working-class Peronist *barrios* of La Plata, where calls for radical change and economic justice were part of neighborhood politics. Nevertheless, she credited her children for sparking within her the struggle for social justice. She and the Asociación Madres believed the only way to honor their children was to take up their radical fight against injustice, and determined the best way to do that was to remain critical of the state even in democracy.

The LF Madres were defiant but sympathetic. A group of 10 Madres, the majority of whom were members of the Madres' founding commission, issued a resolution officially contesting and declaring illegitimate the 1986 re-election of Hebe de Bonafini as President of the

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 153.

Asociación Madres. A representative of the group insisted, “the idea is not to throw out Hebe, but rather to practice internal democracy” by overtaking leadership of the Madres organization.<sup>186</sup>

Hebe was incensed, and immediately denied the possibility of a schism. Her critique of the dissenting group foreshadowed her later embrace of popular anger: she alluded to the “lack of support of this small group who claims the right to act like elite, ignoring the equality of mothers, without supremacy of some over others.”<sup>187</sup> Hebe’s infuriated response and unwillingness to compromise ensured a permanent rift between the moderate, reform-minded, pro-institutional LF Madres and the increasingly radical, popular protest-minded and popular anger-minded Asociación Madres.

#### *Hebe and Popular Anger: Menem and Beyond*

Once detached from the reform-minded, moderate LF Madres, Hebe simply carried on using incendiary rhetoric to make increasingly radical, anti-imperialist claims. Her roots in popular Peronist La Plata, and the Peronist *banderas* of anti-imperialism, national industrialization and social justice, imbued her sense of justice with political-economic concerns for wellbeing as well as survival. Hebe embraced the popular revolutionary frame by taking increasingly more radical stances on questions of impunity and imperialism. Her embrace of popular anger is the catalyst that enabled the change in the Madres’ public perception and collective identity.

From the beginning of Peronist Carlos Menem’s presidency, Hebe was a staunch critic, owing the Menem’s quick turn to pardons for former military repressors and his embrace of a neoliberal economic agenda. In August of 1989, the Madres and other human rights

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<sup>186</sup> “Hubo una fractura en las Madres de Plaza de Mayo,” *Clarín*, 6 February 1986.

<sup>187</sup> “Criticó Bonafini al grupo disidente,” *Clarín*, 7 February 1986.

organizations hosted a protest rally “against amnesty and hunger” in the Plaza de Mayo where Hebe called for the people to “fight against hunger, which kills more than bullets.”<sup>188</sup> It was this same demonstration where Nobel Peace Prize-winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel sharply denounced the “economic terrorism” of neoliberalism.<sup>189</sup>

Driven by contention in society and both her sense of motherist and popular anger, Hebe did not hesitate to spur a full-scale feud with President Carlos Menem. In 1989, she scolded:

The Government lies, Menem prostitutes himself before the military... and we are worse off every time. [...] Because we will not forgive, nor will we forget... We do not want posts nor a place within the system. Organization and mobilization is the only path the people have to change unjust realities. Someday we will change it even though we may not advance to see it.<sup>190</sup>

Her inflammatory insult of Menem would later be exacerbated by repeated vulgar remarks regarding Menem’s relationship with American President George Bush. In 1990, an exasperated Menem wondered, “where do they get the money to keep surviving” and “how do they manage to travel all around the world,” and further chastised the Madres for “dirtying” the Plaza de Mayo with their march.<sup>191</sup> Hebe mused in front of a crowd of 8,000, “the Doctor [Menem] is offended when people touch the Pyramid [in the Plaza], but when his pants are off in front of Bush they can touch whatever they want.”<sup>192</sup>



Instantes previos al acto que cerró la concentración.  
Hebe de Bonafini llamó a luchar ‘contra el hambre’.

“Preliminary moments in the act which closed the gathering. *Hebe de Bonafini called to fight ‘against hunger.’*”  
– *Página 12*, 11 August 1989.

<sup>188</sup> “Con las Madres en la Plaza,” *Página 12*, 11 August 1989.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> “Menem cuestionó la marcha de las Madres porque ensucian la Plaza,” *Página 12*, 7 December 1990.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

The personal feud that developed between Hebe and Menem was a product of her individual uncompromising personality, commitment to activism and radical embrace of popular anger. But it was not confined to only their relationship. Hebe's incendiary remarks and resolute disapproval of—indeed, repugnance with—the Alfonsín and Menem administrations made the possibility of compromise unrealistic. Hebe's consistent willingness to pick a fight introduced popular leftist causes and angry, revolutionary rhetoric, and ensured that the Asociación Madres maintained a militant position as an adversary of the state.

The effect of Hebe's absolute denunciation of Menem can be seen in a flier circulated by the Asociación Madres for their 14<sup>th</sup> *Marcha de Resistencia* in 1994. The flier warned, "What the opposition won't say is that Menem is threatening to repress, in the immediate future, the resistance of the workers and the people to his plans which contemplate... adjustment and poverty for the majority."<sup>193</sup> In 1995 an Asociación Madres' declaration would read:

What the governments of Menem and Alfonsín have left us is abandonment before murderers, impunity before perpetrators of genocide, and the shame of injustice. They left us a country that is spending fortunes on weapons in place of schools and hospitals. Where repression is more economical than social justice... It is the police that protect the 'countries' of the rich while plundering the homes of the poor... For the poor, for the most in need, nothing changes.<sup>194</sup>

Both the Menem and Alfonsín administrations had faced a significant challenge in trying to stabilize and grow Argentina's domestic economy while avoiding a crisis or default at the IMF. Their attempts to avoid military rebellion by issuing impunity measures sparked the Madres' motherist anger; further, their attempts to satisfy international financial obligations

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<sup>193</sup> CPM – FONDO DIPPBA División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa DS, Carpeta Varios, Legajo 36241, 2.

<sup>194</sup> CPM – FONDO DIPPBA División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa DS, Carpeta Varios, Legajo 35766, 2.



bolstered Hebe's penchant for popular anger, and created opportunities for the Madres to embrace popular anger as a mobilizing force in their collective activism.

A 1997 interview with Hebe de Bonafini with the literary magazine *Cerdos y Peces*, Hebe is full of grandiose insults and highly emotional critiques: "I define this government as a fascist, authoritarian, capitalist, mean-spirited, corrupt and murderous government... People die from diseases of poverty, they kill themselves because they have nothing to eat; these are deaths that the government of Menem must take credit for."<sup>195</sup> Hebe even took the time to insult the LF Madres, whose embrace of institutional reparations represented to her a dismissal of the popular struggle and anger so central to her perspective and the developing radical motherhood of the Asociación Madres.

To finish up, to buy one's conscience, you are selling the blood of your child, and they are finished off, because if they pay you, you accept the death, and you cannot demand more. We are going to keep fighting. Though they use the *pañuelo* they are no longer Madres de Plaza de Mayo, those that accept money. Since always we said that we would not sell the blood of our children. The *Fundadoras* sell out... the *Abuelas* sell out... What a government we have! Human rights are violated, prostituted; all the human rights organizations favor and promote economic reparations.<sup>196</sup>

Hebe's open embrace of popular anger, inflammatory rhetorical style and absolutist anti-imperialism were what first introduced the popular activist tradition in Argentina to the human rights motherist activism of the Madres' early days. Later in Menem's administration, the fomenting economic crises inspired the proliferation of a popular protest cycle in the late 1990s and early 2000s, distinct at first for the mobilization of the unemployed working poor, and later for the multi-sectoral nature of popular resistance.

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<sup>195</sup> CPM – FONDO DIPPBA División Central de Documentación, Registro y Archivo, Mesa DS, Carpeta Varios, Legajo 37415, 9.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

During this time, Hebe supported and embraced popular anger, especially by continuing her critiques of imperialist international financial and political institutions. In September of 2001, as Argentina faced potential ruin from the weight of foreign debt, the U.S. experienced one of the deadliest attacks on U.S. soil since Pearl Harbor in the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks. Hebe's response was to point out that "among the victims of the Twin Towers attacks were managers of businesses and employees of international financial organizations that... are responsible for the poverty and death of children around the world."<sup>197</sup> She further implied that Americans deserved a taste of their own medicine for engaging in imperialist meddling for so long.

The LF Madres often critiqued Hebe's provocative remarks. In 2000, Hebe expressed sympathy for the cause of the nationalist and separatist terrorist organization *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* ("Basque Homeland and Liberty," or ETA) which had been terrorizing Spain since 1968, on the basis of her support for anti-imperialism.<sup>198</sup> In response to Hebe's ultimate prioritization of leftist idealism over anti-violence, the LF Madres declared:

We are simply the relatives of victims of state terrorism in Argentina who are in no way in favor of reaching our objectives of justice using their same methods, because then we would be the same as them. [...] De Bonafini represents only the minority group of the mothers of the disappeared and, aware of her authoritative and intolerant talent, we very much doubt that the opinions she dumps out are the expression of a situation of consensus in the heart of the that she leads and to which, in our opinion, she has arrived via courses which distort her original meaning.<sup>199</sup>

Though the LF Madres would critique Hebe and maintain influence as more institutionalized members of civil society in Argentina, the Madres' international public image remained one of radical leftist motherist activism as Hebe and the Asociación women continued to push the envelope in their revolutionary leftist reach.

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<sup>197</sup> "Polémicas declaraciones de Bonafini," *La Nación*, 10 October 2001.

<sup>198</sup> "Las fundadoras de las Madres de Mayo se desmarcan de De Bonafini," *El País*, 29 October 2000.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

Leftist Peronist President Néstor Kirchner came to office in 2003 and gained the Madres' approval by adopting sweeping human rights reforms, repealing impunity laws, re-opening criminal trials, and establishing social programs to promote Memory, Truth and Justice. The Madres enjoyed a close alliance with Kirchner, and embraced institutional tactics Hebe had earlier spurned by cooperating with the government in administering social programs. Though the Madres broke from militancy during the Kirchnerist governments, Hebe's penchant for controversy remained.

In some cases, the LF Madres did follow Hebe's example in leaning left; in 2005, when President George W. Bush visited Argentina, they attended an anti-imperialist rally hosted by Hebe and the Asociación Madres, though they remained a separate entity.<sup>200</sup> When Bush visited Brazil in 2007, Hebe's Asociación alongside a coalition of unions hosted Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez in an "anti-imperialist rally," where he decried the visit as "an act of imperialism, adding, 'Gringo, go home!'"<sup>201</sup> Chávez spoke for a coalition of leftist governments and civil society organizations throughout Argentina, including his admirer Hebe, when he criticized Bush: "He thinks he is Columbus, discovering poverty after seven years in power."<sup>202</sup>

On the anniversary of Chávez's death, Hebe delivered a speech at the Venezuelan Embassy in Buenos Aires where she remembered her "very special relationship" with Chávez and remarked: "There are indispensable men like Néstor [Kirchner] and Chávez and today more than ever we think of them. We need them immensely."<sup>203</sup> Her unquestioning and emboldened support for the revolutionary left throughout Latin America, rooted in her working-class

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<sup>200</sup> "Madres de Plaza de Mayo repudian a Bush y elogian a Chávez," *La Nación*, 3 November 2005.

<sup>201</sup> Rutenberg and Rohter, "Bush and Chávez," 10 March 2007.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> "Hebe de Bonafini sobre Hugo Chávez: 'Sí existen los hombres indispensables,'" *Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela*, Ministro del Poder Popular para la Comunicación e Información, 5 February 2014. Accessed 1 March 2018.

upbringing and sense of popular justice, seems at times to overtake the Madres' original collective identity as non-violent mothers.

Yet this radical departure from traditional motherhood stems directly from Hebe's upbringing within the tradition of popular protest in Argentina, in the working-class neighborhoods of industrial Buenos Aires Province, and it successfully resonated with the Madres' allies and broader society for decades. Though her radical absolutism may not reflect the opinions of the LF Madres or even the broader ranks of the Asociación Madres, her individual experience and disposition made a decisive impact on the Madres' public perception, the limits of their claims, and the escalation of their contention.

## Conclusion

The Madres de Plaza de Mayo have stood the test of time and adapted their motherist politics to different contexts and presidencies for over 40 years. We saw how the Madres took an interim break from militancy to pursue institutionalization during the Kirchner administrations; have they maintained this sidelined position in the current administration, that of center-right Mauricio Macri? Does their popular motherist message, rooted in labor populism of the 1940s and human rights activism of the 1970s, resonate with a 21<sup>st</sup> century audience? Are ever younger generations of Argentines still within the domain of the Madres' maternal emotional and political domain, or is their influence starting to fade?

Since the beginning of his presidency in December 2015, President Macri has faced controversy over his administration's questioning the estimate of 30,000 disappeared persons. The number has been a matter of debate between human rights organizations and military sympathizers since the end of the dictatorship: CONADEP lists 9,000 names; military intelligence reported 22,000 killings in 1978; the same year, the dictators claimed 15,000 to the papal ambassador.<sup>204</sup> Nevertheless, human rights organizations based their estimate of 30,000 off the CONADEP list, witness testimonies and tracing of local grassroots organizations. No democratic president has questioned it.

In an interview with a Spanish BuzzFeed reporter in 2016, Macri responded, "I have no idea, I don't know, it's a debate that I'm not going to enter. If there were nine thousand or 30 thousand; or those names written on the wall or if there were many more. It seems to me a discussion that doesn't make sense."<sup>205</sup> Human rights organizations were furious.

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<sup>204</sup> Uki Goñi, "Blaming the victims: dictatorship denialism is on the rise in Argentina," *The Guardian*, 29 August 2016.

<sup>205</sup> Guido Carelli Lynch, "Macri y la cifra de desaparecidos: 'No tengo idea cuántos fueron,'" *Clarín*, 10 August 2016.

Estela de Carlotto, leader of the typically less militant Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo, remarked, “What evil to start to manipulate the count! He’d better give us the list of those who he thinks they are, if he has it.”<sup>206</sup> The Asociación Madres have adopted the chant “Macri, trash, you are the dictatorship!” to voice their discontent throughout his time in office. A film released in 2016 by the Madres’ media organization went so far as to include an impassioned protester’s claim that Macri’s family, members of the Argentine elite involved in offshore finance, was a “family of the dictatorship.”<sup>207</sup> The Madres’ attempt to frame Macri as not only an ally of the dictatorship, but its son, shows yet another reformulation of their motherist activism. It suggests an attempt to construct not just their own collective identity but that of the adversary an intergenerational experience. This budding intergenerational adversarial identity merits further discussion as the Madres continue to combat the Macri administration.

Additional research should include tracking the phenomena of intergenerational collective identity and emotion in the continuing activism of the HIJOS and those children recovered by the Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo; further, the unique experience and impact of these affective and temporal relations may play a role in other social movements, even those not centered on the familial. Further questions include the enabling conditions and potential implications of master frame hybridization, and the necessary or sufficient individual and contextual traits that establish a leader’s decisiveness.

I have shown how the Madres de Plaza de Mayo used and hybridized master frames available to them in Argentine society and exercised emotional agency to develop and justify an intergenerational emotional experience of activism that made their protest resonant with

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<sup>206</sup> Carlos E. Cué, “Polémica en Argentina por las cifras de desaparecidos de la dictadura,” *El País*, 28 January 2016.

<sup>207</sup> “‘‘‘TODOS SON MIS HIJOS’ EN LA COMPETENCIA OFICIAL DEL FIDBA,’’ *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo* (blog), August 1, 2016, <http://madres.org/index.php/todos-son-mis-hijos-en-la-competencia-oficial-del-fidba/>; Miguel Jorquera, “Una tradición de las offshore,” *Página 12*, 11 December 2016..

Argentine society. Further, I have shown how an individual leader can hold a decisive impact in deciding a movement's future. On the subject of their evolution, Madres remark: "It went according to the circumstances;" "we were learning with the times."<sup>208</sup> Their evolution was not a grand strategy, nor a manipulation; it was a product of social context, emotional and political agency, and a radical working-class consciousness. It was motherism, for "the times."<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> *Todos son mis hijos*, Uribe (2016).

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

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